

Who Are God's People?

Romans 9:25

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Will you take a Bible, loved ones, and look at Romans 9:25, "As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'my beloved.'" Let's talk about the question, who are God's people? We've often shared that all of us in this room seem to be in the same boat. We all do look much the same and we seem to be interested in the same things because here we all are singing hymns and praying and talking about God and yet you know we've often shared that there is really a great division among us as far as our futures are concerned.

There is a great division that separates us into two groups, really. And the two groups will differ very, very much as far as their eventual future is concerned. There are some of us here who have just minds and bodies and emotions and are really just creatures, we're just like little animals and all we've got is our minds and bodies and emotions and the only thing that will happen to those when we die is that they will deteriorate and then after death, they will keep on going the way they've been going during this present life and so if we are proud and anxious people here on earth, the infinity of time duration that will occur after death, will actually make that pride and that anxiety unbearable hell. It will.

We don't realize the blessing of finiteness here. It limits the effects of things like fear and anxiety but when there is limitless time then the way our minds and emotions have been working in this life, they will continue to work forever, except that they will lack even the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit that they have here on earth. And so our pride and anxiety will become unbearable hell and we will find ourselves living with billions of other people who are similarly continuing with their mind and emotions to do what they've been doing throughout their lives here on earth. And so there will be critical, sarcastic people and there will be angry, irritable people and there will be greedy, capricious people and they all will be trying to exert their will over the rest of us.

So, as that goes on and on forever into eternity, all those powers will intensify to the point where we will be unbearable torturers of each other and that's part of what Jesus meant when He said they will go away into everlasting punishment. God will have to let us do with our lives what our free wills want to do and He cannot stop us, and some of us loved ones here are in that situation this morning, that's all we are.

We're just little minds and emotions and bodies. We're little creatures. We're no more than that and we have all kinds of habits and attitudes that will lead us into a hell of our own making when infinite time begins. There are others of us here who have the same attributes. We have minds and emotions and bodies but we have become aware of another kind of life. We've become aware of God, our Creator, and our spirits have become alive to Him and we have a relationship with Him and the Spirit of His Son is in the process of remaking us and remolding us and the same will happen with us.

We will continue as we're going in this present life, after death, we'll continue as we are. That is, we'll continue with Jesus' Spirit refining us and remolding us and remaking us more and more. So we will continue to become more and more like Him and we will live with billions of other people who

are becoming more like Him too and together we will share the love that He is recreating in us with each other and we'll share it forever in the presence of our Creator. That's part of what Jesus meant when He said we'll inherit eternal life.

It is really important, loved ones, however nice we are to each other in these services, we ought to face the fact that there is a great division between us. Some of us are going to go and remain forever in a hell of our own making and some of us are going to go into a heaven of understanding and peace and loving family relationships.

Now that is such a San Andreas fault, that is such a massive division, that it is vital to know what side you're on. It's just vital. It's vital to know who are God's people. Who are children of God? Who are Christians? Who are people who are going to live with their God forever? That's what I'd ask you to just share with me this morning. Who are God's people among us here, me included, who of us are God's people?

I honestly think that some of you have still a superficial notion of what a child of God is. I honestly do, loved ones. I think some of you still have a shallow, superficial notion of what it is to be a child of God or to be a Christian. I think some of you still are caught up with the name. I think some of you have not faced old Shakespeare's statement "What's in a name?" You still think name is important and you still have the feeling that you must be a child of God because you're regarded by other people as a child of God, you're called Christian by other people, you're regarded as a good, church-goer by your friends and your colleagues.

In other words, you belong to the right group and I'd ask you to honestly search your hearts, all of you. I am going to search mine as God speaks to us, but search your hearts because I think some of us feel, "Well, it's belonging to the right church," or "It's belonging to the right group," or "It's belonging to the right Bible study group," or "the right supper club," or "It's the crowd that you run with that makes you a child of God. It's the company you keep that makes you a part of the people of God."

In other words, I think some of us here feel -- now I ask you to ask yourself this -- is this not near the truth with many of us? I think some of us feel, "Well, we've been together for decades now, this Bible study group, this congregation. My wife and me, my children and me, the friends in my Bible study, we've been together for decades. It's unthinkable that God would split us up. It's just unthinkable." And loved ones, is that not true that there are some husbands and wives here, some sons and daughters who think, "Well, of course, I am of the people of God. Of course, these people love me. My wife would not want to be separated from me. My children wouldn't want to be separated from me. My friends, they love me so much, why we see each other every Thursday night. We go out together every Thursday night. No way, no way if God loves, will He split us up."

Loved ones, I think there are many of us, maybe dear husbands who suffer this this morning because their wives want them to or the other way round, or sons and daughters or fathers and mothers and we have in the back of our minds that we're people of God because we run with the people of God. We're with the people of God. We keep company with the people of God. We appreciate the people of God and so we must ourselves be children of God.

Now loved ones, there are many Bible study groups, there are many church congregations, there are many Rotary Clubs, there are many supper clubs, there are many groups of people who are going to be shattered at death and smashed by God and split apart and they will suddenly find that they're not

going to be treated as a group by God but they're going to have to face God individually for their own lives.

Could I say this to you dear husbands and wives, even you who feel so close to each other, you're going to have to deal with God separately, do you know that? Eventually, you'll have the joy if God is related to you of going through into the gates of heaven together but first of all you'll have to face God separately, you will, every one of us loved ones will have to face God separately. We can't be saved as a group. Why do we say that, because 'THE' group was smashed by God, 'THE' group above all groups. I don't know if you know what that group is but there is one group that is 'THE' group in the whole world, throughout all the world's history. This group has survived a dozen civilizations, it alone has stayed together. It is 'THE' group in the world and yet it was smashed by God. That's of course the Israelites, that is 'THE' group, that is the one group that has survived dozens of civilizations and that group was smashed by God.

Now, loved ones, I'd like you to see that if you'd look at Romans 9:25, "As indeed he [that is God] says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people, I will call 'My people'. " You see a lot of us tend to think, "Oh, that refers to the previous verse you see where it says, "Even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?" So, the 'not my people' are the Gentiles, of course." No. You look back to the actual prophecy of Hosea 1. This is the original prophecy to which Paul is referring that God spoke through Hosea back in the eighth century. Hosea 1:6. Hosea, you remember, was told by God to marry. "And she conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, 'Call her name Not pitied, for I will no more have pity on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all." It's the house of Israel. God said, "You are no longer my people", and in Hosea 1:8-9, Hosea's wife had another child, "When she had weaned Not pitied, she conceived and bore a son. And the Lord said, 'Call his name Not my people, for you are not my people and I am not your God.'"

In other words, God said to the group above all groups, "You're no longer my people." Why did He say it? Well, you remember the Jewish people were split in the eighth century into two nations, Israel in the north and Judah in the south and Israel gave up worshipping God and began to worship idols and so God allowed Israel to be deported by Assyria into exile in 722 B.C. and the northern kingdom of Israel held the 10 tribes of Israel while the rest were in the southern kingdom of Judah.

So, the main bulk of the Jewish people were in the northern kingdom of Israel and the northern kingdom rebelled and worshipped idols. God allowed Assyria to come in and treat Israel as a vessel of wrath and deport them into exile. Do you know what happened to those 10 tribes? You can almost guess it because we all know about the 10 lost tribes of Israel. They were absorbed into Assyria and into the rest of the Gentile nations and they were lost forever. In other words, God smashed the group above all groups and He did it because in their daily lives they worshipped idols. Even though they had the name of Israel, God changed that name and said, "You're no longer Israel. That name means nothing to me, it's the way you live your every day life that is important," and the Israelites themselves were living their lives in dependence on things other than God.

For instance, one of the things they depended on was their money and their possessions for their sense of safety. The Hebrew word in Israel at that time for ownership or possession was Baal. "Ba-al" is the Hebrew verb meaning "I own" or "I possess" and that's of course the meaning of them worshipping "Ba-al". it wasn't simply that they worshipped some idol called Baal. That simply symbolized for them a way of life that they depended on for their security and their safety, and

their sense of safety and security financially, they depended on their possessions and on their money that they got and on their jobs. And because they depended on that rather than their God, God washed His hands of them.

It was the same with enjoyment and it was the same with significance. They depended for their sense of importance on the way they could manipulate other people day-by-day, the way they could make other people do what they wanted them to, and so they depended for their sense of worth and their sense of value on the important respect that others gave to them -- not on whether their God loved them or not. That's what it means that they worshipped "Moloch".

"Moloch" is the Hebrew verb "to rule over", it's the same word as king. 'Maloch' is to rule over or to dominate or to manipulate and because the Israelites began to live their everyday lives independent on these things rather than God, God split them and smashed them and gave them over so that they were lost completely and that's why we talk about the 10 lost tribes.

Loved ones, that's why I am sharing with you that you aren't the people of God because you belong to a certain group. Because God Himself smashed the group above all groups years ago and they've never been heard of since. I think some of us say, "Well, yeah, I know that. What's in a name?" The name isn't important, it's what you are that's important and we believe that children of God depend on what they are except that we give it a little twist.

We say what you are depends on what you know and then by a subtle little twist of logic we say, "Yes, it's what you know that counts, that's what makes you a child of God." We say to ourselves, we as a society here, we westerners, we know things that other people don't know at all, that's why we're a Christian civilization. We know what we're meant to be. We know we're meant to be honest. We know we are and that's what makes us children of God.

Other societies, pagan societies, don't care about honesty but we as a society know we're meant to be honest, though we aren't honest. We as a society, we know we're meant to love. Other societies don't respect love at all but we know, we appreciate love, we even talk about it in our television commercials. We know we're meant to love, that's what makes us children of God though we in our own personal lives don't actually love each other, not really.

We say, "Well, we as a nation respect the rule of law, that's what makes us a Christian nation, that's why we are the people of God. There are other civilizations that don't respect the rule of law but we do, even though in our own personal lives, we're often lawless," And somehow, loved ones, we get the idea, "Well, look at the privileges we have. We know things that other nations don't know. You can't go into a restaurant, you can't pay with our money without seeing God's name on it, you can't do anything in this country. You can't turn on the radio without hearing about God. Of course we're the people of God, of course I am a child of God because I know more about God than any other nation does. I am not in a pagan heathen nation. I have privileges that they don't have."

Loved ones, so had the Jews, greater privileges than all of those, just look at them in Romans 9:4, "They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ." Despite all those privileges that they had, God smashed them because they didn't live their daily lives in relationship to Him.

It doesn't matter what privileges we have, loved ones, it doesn't. In fact we'll be judged more

strictly because of the privileges that we have but it is really important that you break that hold, that deception gets over you in a country as beautiful as America. That hold where you begin to believe, "Look, we must be God's people. We know so much more about Him than any other nation." Loved ones, it's not so. Who are God's children? Well, it's interesting because that verse that we're studying, if you look at it, Romans 9:25, "As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people' -- that is, those 10 lost tribes who were scattered throughout the nations and became part of the Gentiles -- 'I will call "my people," -- that is, they will come to me on the same basis as other people do and who were not beloved, those 10 lost tribes who were rejected by me, I will call my beloved on the same basis as I call other people beloved. What basis is that?

Galatians 4:6, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" If you sense within you the same Spirit as moved in Jesus of Nazareth, that produces in you an attitude to God, the same as His, then you're God's child.

That is, if you sense within you a Spirit that looks out to your Creator and regards Him as your Father, then you're His child. Not Father in the old general sense, you understand that. General common grace brings to all creatures of God a sense that He is the general Father of all that He has created. So, there can be that and many mystics will use "Father" in that sense, "Oh yes, God has created everything so He is the general Father of everything", but that's not what we're talking about.

We are talking about an intimate, personal attitude to God that leaves you absolutely unembarrassed and at home when you look up in private prayer into His face and call Him your dear Father. Now if you can do that, do you do that? Do you do that day-by-day? Not, you know, this old business, "Oh the Lord did this, the Lord did that", when it's either just luck or chance or whatever, not that kind of general terms, "Oh yeah, yeah, I believe in my Father. I mean I speak to my heavenly Father every morning."

Well, you know your own dear father is so dear to you and you wouldn't talk about him casually like that. So if you treat God as your dear, loving Father and you sense a Spirit within you that leaps out towards Him every day with that kind of intimate, personal, unembarrassed attitude, then you're a child of God. God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your heart and that Spirit cries, "Abba" or "Dad" or "Father" to God.

Now do you have that attitude to God? That's one of the marks of a child of God. There's another mark too, loved ones, because that Spirit produces something in your life. Galatians 5:22-24, because that Spirit of Jesus within you, produces attitudes. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

Now if you have allowed your flesh or your body or your mind and emotions to be destroyed with Jesus on the Cross, as the "French Connection" between you and the drugs of security and significance and happiness that we get from the world -- that is, if you die to that, if you've died to people's respect and people's approval and what people do to you, if you've died to that -- there comes into your life a sweet spirit, that's it.

It is a gift. It is a miraculous gift. It's not something you produce. If you have died, you'll find it. If you have died to running your own life as your own God, if you've died to treating other

people as the source of your happiness and your security and to your significance and you're looking to God alone, He gives you a sweet Spirit of Jesus that spontaneously begets love and longsuffering and gentleness. So that you're not harsh with your wife, you're not sarcastic with your roommates.

You sense a Spirit rising within you. I don't mean you sense the wrong spirit rising and you suppress it -- that's not a child of God. A child of God is one in whom the sweet Spirit of fragrance from Jesus rises automatically within them and produces the same love and kindness and gentleness as Jesus Himself has. Now that's a gift of God to you, that's the gift of the Holy Spirit, once you've died to putting the world and other people in the place of God in your life to supply all your needs.

You can see why that works. You stop grasping, you stop grabbing, you stop fending people off, you stop being frightened of people, you're at last free so the Spirit of Jesus is able to love them. Now that's another mark of the children of God. Last mark, loved ones, is in 1 John 3:24, and for many of us, you know, it's the most crucial.

1 John 3:24, "All who keep His commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us." Now because it's such a crucial one, let me explain it just very simply and plainly once more. Jesus loves His Father. He'll do anything for His Father. He'll even die if His Father tells Him to. So when Jesus' Spirit comes into you, that's the feeling you have. Nothing is burdensome for you, no command of the Father is difficult for you. The Spirit of Jesus within you rises up and rejoices to obey the Father, just rejoices.

So real obedience, you can see, is produced by the Spirit of Jesus within you. Real obedience is a fruit of the Spirit of Jesus within you. Now many of us can produce a man-made obedience which comes because we have not really been willing to die with Jesus to all the other sources of our security and our happiness. And many of us who have not really died to other people, who want other people in the world plus God, we have real problems with that.

We can produce an approximation to the ethical norms of our society and we try to call that obedience and many of us do that. We often say, "Yeah, yeah, I must be a child of God because sure I try to obey." Trying to obey is not obeying. It's like that sign you remember that I told you of in England, everybody's so polite there, we say here "No Smoking." They say, "Try Not to Smoke". So you know, I'm trying not to smoke, I really am trying, I am trying not to smoke. Well, that's not obedience, that's trying to obey but it's not obedience.

Obedience is a fruit of the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of Jesus is the gift of God to you if you've accepted what God has done to you in Christ, which is to cut you off from the world and from other people as the source of what God alone can give you. Now obedience is complete and absolute. I'll tell you how to discover obedience that is not real.

Obedience that is not real often shows itself in the private personal life in two ways. One, it comes up against besetting sins that it can't overcome. And there are many loved ones who produce an ethical approximation to the norms required by their society but in their own personal private lives, they have certain besetting sins that they cannot overcome. So they'll say to you, "Yeah, yeah I obey the Lord except I do have problems with this or I do have problems with that."

Now the Spirit of Jesus has no problems like that. The Spirit of Jesus obeys gloriously and completely. So that's one of the difficulties that a person has who is producing their own obedience

and the reason they're producing their own obedience is that they want to choose what they died to in their lives and so they aren't willing really to turn everything over to Christ and so they still keep pretending that they are, in some sense, Christians and they have this partial obedience that they keep up.

Another of the marks is that when it comes to little personal things that God wants them to obey Him on, and that He isn't asking anybody else to obey Him on, they have trouble with those. That is, they'll obey the general commandments of God that everybody else accepts but when the Father asks them to do little things that are expedient for them alone, then they have problems with those, they sidestep those.

Now, loved ones, the mark of a child of God is that he or she keeps the commandments of God. And why do they keep them? Though this will kill you -- they keep them because they can't avoid keeping them! They can't help it. They can't help it. In fact it's actually what the Bible says, "They cannot sin because God's nature abides in them and they cannot sin." They can sin if they rebel against Jesus' Spirit and just decide to disobey God, but while they submit to Jesus' Spirit on the Cross, then they can't sin because the Spirit of Jesus joyfully obeys His Father. That's what a child of God is.

Honestly, brothers and sisters, when I think of the agonies that some loved ones are going through in communist prison camps and when I think of the agonies that loved ones face in Hungary and in China, and when you think of the obedience that they practice and then here are we, thousands of us here in this country, trying to protest, "Well I am a child of God but I still have trouble with this act of obedience or this act of disobedience."

Don't you see what a vast gap there is between human effort and obedience? Which is not human effort at all, sure it's not, it's lack of human effort. It's lack of the human will to do all what God wants. Because I'd put it to you again. You know that the 30-year-old who has been smoking for 10-15 years or the 60-year-old who has been smoking for 40 years, you know what they do with the smoking when they discover they have cancer. No question then about whether they can stop it or not.

So the issue is not, are you willing to stop it or can you stop it? The issue is, do you really want to stop it? Do you really want to give your whole life into Jesus' hands and do you want His Spirit to live in you the way His Spirit lived in Him? And that means, are you willing to die like Jesus? Are you willing to live like Jesus? If you say yes to that, God sends the Spirit of His Son into your life and you find a new life surging up within you. It's a miracle.

You can take a step this morning; you can begin this morning if you want. You can deal with the things that God has convicted you of as being wrong and you can decide whether you're going to give that into God's hands and if you are, He'll send the Spirit of His Son into your life and you'll be changed. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we see that there is not a partial Christianity or a partial son or a partial daughter. We're either borne of Your Spirit or we're not and Lord we would come to You now and ask You to show us in what way You destroyed us in Jesus. What did You destroy there, Lord? And what of that are we not willing to let go?

Lord, show us and we'll let it go now. Lord, if it's the extra five minutes in bed instead of getting up to pray. If it's refusing to tithe our gifts and our income to You because we're not

sure if we have enough, Lord, whatever it is, show us it plainly so that we will know what step to take and what to commit completely to You because Lord Jesus, we want Your Spirit in our lives, a different Spirit that will make us God's children from within, not because we belong to a group and not because we know certain things but because we have been made children of God by the Spirit of His only Son. We ask this for Your glory. And 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 evermore. Amen.