

The Principle of the Remnant

Romans 9:27

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This is just an illustration because you know God has told us, we should not ask for money but we should work hard ourselves. And we should trust his Spirit to guide all of us what we should give in, when we should give it. So, this is just an illustration, I am not asking for your money. But let's suppose that we decided to start another station in Australia and let's imagine that we decided to start a restaurant hotel complex in Sydney and we needed \$200,000 down payment.

Now, you don't need to put your hand up, just imagine. How many of you would give five dollars? This is what put me off church, this kind of stuff. But how many of you would give five dollars? Now, how many of you would give fifty dollars? Now, how many of you would give a hundred dollars? Now, how many of you would give a thousand dollars? Now, how many of you would give five thousand dollars? Now, how many of you would do without something to give the money? How many of you would do without a vacation, or a new car, or with a new davenport so that you could give the money?

Now, how many of you would give up your job and your home and go yourselves as part of the staff? How many of you would go for five years? How many of you would go for life? Now, I'll make a prophecy. At the beginning, maybe 80 or 90 percent of us would raise our hands, but as you got on to the last questions, the hands would grow fewer and fewer. Isn't that right?

I mean fewer and fewer of us would keep our hands up as we got to the last questions that were asked. Maybe even as we got to the question "How many would do without something to give the money?", but certainly that would be a tremendous step when we were asked, "How many of us would give up our jobs and our homes and go ourselves?"

I think we just all agree with that without being hypocritical or self-defensive at all, the number of hands would diminish as the questions went on. Now, why is that? Why would that be? Well, isn't it just a fact that we could say "yes" to the early questions without greatly changing our way of life? Isn't that right?

Most of us could work up five dollars from somewhere without making a great change in the way we live our daily life but as you get to the last questions, you find you have to make radical changes in the way you live your life, give up your job and your home and go yourself and you know what you have to do when you face that question.

You have to think, "Now wait a minute, is this real, this thing that he's asking me to do, and do I really care all that much for it? I mean I like coming to this church on a Sunday. It's a nice prelude to lunch but I am not sure of giving up my job and my home." And isn't it true that you're forced to find out what you are really living for, and you're forced to find out what you die for, isn't that right?

You're forced by those latter questions to determine what the real you is. What do you really think is important in life and what are you prepared to make sacrifices for? That's the principle of the remnant because you could say that at the end, on the last few questions, there is only a remnant of hands up. A remnant is a small piece of a garment, you see, and that's the principle of the remnant.

God is constantly trying to destroy what is unreal in our supposed belief in Him in order to expose what is really real and that's the way He works with us in our own lives. Really loved ones, it's happening with each one of us here, honestly. When we were 5-years-old with our lollypops at Sunday School, God asked us do we love him, and there we were, protected by the limitations of our own backyards and by our 50 cent pocket money and we said, "Sure, sure we love you", and it was so easy.

I am not saying it was unreal, it was real at that time but it was so simple, and then came the Arabian Night's life, you know of girls and guys and drive-in movies and the question "Do you love God" becomes just a little more complicated and you do see a little more what it means, it means a wee bit of choosing. You just can't love God and everything else at the same time.

Then comes the period in our lives when we're trying to establish our status, you know, and our security and our first jobs and we're struggling for some kind of recognition and some kind of stability. Then, at last, we begin to understand the question a little more, "Do you love God?", and we begin to see some other things that that will involve. Then, as you get over that period, you begin to get into the time when the passions cool and the vanity of the world is more obvious, when at last you begin to see yourself for what you are. And you begin to see what loving God means. That's the principle of the remnant, you see, that's it.

God is always cutting down to get to our hearts. He is always trying to get to what we really are. And if you say to me, "Why, why does He have to?" Well, you and I are so utterly engrossed in ourselves and we're so utterly preoccupied with self-love that we willfully misunderstand the absoluteness of the love that God is asking us to give to him. So, we're always offering him partial love instead of the absolute love that he created us to give. Therefore, He's always involved in trying to expose that to us, trying to show us. Because, of course, the other thing is true: that we are always offering Him partial love, a little surrender. Then, we are so prone to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think that we treat ourselves as his children, as if we're giving him full love.

So God is always involved in trying to cut into our hearts, to enable us to see what is really real in our attitude to him and what is absolutely unreal. Now that's the principle of the remnant, loved ones, and that's the principle that is mentioned in the verse we're studying. So maybe you'd like to look at it. It's Romans 9:27.

Romans 9:27, "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will be saved.'" That's what it was like. You remember the Israelites acknowledged God, thought he was great, respected him, worshipped him -- when he was delivering them from slavery in Egypt. But as soon as God allowed their physical circumstances to deteriorate, well, you could see how they responded. It's Exodus 16:2. So, God delivered them from slavery, brought them into the wilderness, you remember, to check out, "Well, do they just love me for what I can do for them physically."

Exodus 16:2, "And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness and said to them, 'Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.'" Once God allowed them to suffer some physical

circumstances that were not pleasant, they showed how much they loved their God and how much they believed in him and for that reason, God allowed them to wander for 40 years in the wilderness. Really, until all that generation who turned against him were dead. Then he allowed the remnant of people who were prepared to believe God, even when their physical circumstances were not pleasant, he allowed that remnant to come into Israel and then, you remember, what happened when they came into the land of Canaan.

You remember, they conquered it and then they began to settle down and it wasn't long before they began to worship the counterfeit gods of the Canaanites along with God Himself, to such an extent that God had to allow the Assyrians to come in and capture them and deport the best of the Israelites out of the land of Israel altogether. That remnant then learned that they were to worship God despite their spiritual environment.

So another remnant came out, do you see that? God is always cutting down the numbers. We're always so dumb you know and naïve, we love to see big numbers and we think, "Oh as long as you have the numbers, what does it matter about the quality as long as you have the numbers. You'll overwhelm them with mass." But God is always cutting down the numbers, saying, "Forget the numbers, forget the numbers. Forget the noise you're making with your surrender. Is your surrender real or is it not?"

Then you remember what happened. That remnant that learned to worship God whatever their spiritual environment was like, whether other people were worshipping God or not, then they began to treasure the temple and the sacrificial system and the ritual and the Psalm singing. They began to love that more than God. They began to love the ceremonial laws and the religious observances, the methods of loving God more than God Himself and so God allowed the Babylonians to come in and capture the land of Canaan again and deport more of the Israelites than ever before.

He deported them off, you remember. The King of Babylon deported them off to Babylon and there they were prohibited from temple worship and prohibited from public worship. And what happened was that a remnant of people developed who worshipped God in their inner hearts, inside in their hearts, irrespective of whether they had sacrifices or temple or anything. That's what God is doing in your life, really, that's what God is doing.

He is working out that principle of the remnant in your life. We all, you know, at 13, we give up the world for Jesus because, of course, we don't possess the world. So, we can give it up. At 18, we'd maybe give up half the world because we only possess half of it, we think. Then, gradually, God gets this down to brass tacks and finds out what are you really like. "Okay, forget all the big talk, forget all the promises, forget all the singing and all the prayers, what are you really like in your relationship to me? Where do I stand in your priorities?"

So, loved ones, it's foolish for us to make sense or to try to make sense of God's promises to the Jews by regarding every Jew who is born of Jewish blood and has family connections that are Jewish. It's foolish of us to try to make sense of God's promises by regarding them all as Jews. They just aren't.

You remember Paul said it, it's Romans 9:27, that chapter at the beginning, Romans chapter 9, verse 27. "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea', [though they appeared to be thousands and millions of them], only a remnant of them will be saved.'" Why? Because of Romans 9:6.

Romans 9:6b, "For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel." In other words, the only way you make sense of God's promises to the Israelites, is by seeing that it's only a remnant within the Jews that really do believe in God and trust him. In fact, there are many Jews, including I think the ex-Prime Minister, that don't even believe in God.

There are many Jews that are virtually agnostics. So you can make no sense of God's promises if you blindly regard everybody who calls himself a Jew as a Jew. It's a remnant within the Jewish people that are beginning to take God seriously. So with us.

Do you know that never in our history have so many people attended church as do now in America? Really, there are more people attending church now than at any other time in America. There are more people who say they believe in God and believe in Jesus than ever before in America. So much so that the media, the Time magazine, Newsweek often have articles talking about the resurgence of evangelical Christianity.

I think we all know that, and that it is not only dependent on our dear Jimmy Carter but all over the nation, there is a resurgence of evangelical Christianity. Everybody is noticing it and it seems as if there is a great move towards God except for one thing. Wherever in the past there has been a revival of real Christianity, whether it's under Wesley in the 18th century in England, or whether it's in Ireland in the 1859 revival, or whether it's in the Hebrides of Scotland in the 1950s, wherever there has been a revival of real Christianity, living relationship with God, one thing has happened: white gloves have been presented to the magistrates and the judges of the courts because there were no cases to try. That's right.

If you go back and read those revival histories, you'll find that wherever there was a revival of real relationship with God among the people, the morality was so touched by the Spirit of Jesus that the crime rate was drastically reduced to the point in some areas where they actually presented white gloves to the judges and the magistrates of the courts because there were no cases to be tried.

Now you know the next sentence, because we have a strange phenomenon. We have a nation in which more people go to church than ever before. We have a nation where more people say they believe in God and believe in Jesus than ever before and we have a rising crime rate. On the whole, the crime rate is not being touched by the so-called revival of Christianity. Of course, what we have is a revival of religion, isn't that right? It's not a revival of Christianity.

Christianity is a life lived. We have a revival of religion, a revival of interest in worship, and a revival of interest in certain beliefs and certain life patterns and habits but we don't really have a revival of Christianity. Yet do you see what is happening -- the principle of the remnant? Out of that scraped amorphous mass of people who are all for church and for Christianity, out of this great amorphous mass, God is cutting out another remnant of people who really are God's children.

What is the distinguishing mark of that remnant? Oh, what it has always been. What it has always been: action, not belief -- obedience, not a whole lot of talk. What it has always been: the difference between the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. The distinguishing mark of the remnant is always that they live it. They live it. They don't talk about it, they don't make a whole song about their beliefs, they live it. They live like God's children.

In other words, there are thousands of us, millions of us, actually, here in the States who say we

believe that Jesus died for us and they'll even say we believe that our people-dependent, thing-dependent, circumstance-dependent old selves were crucified with Him so that we might live dependent on Him alone.

There are millions of us who say we believe that and there are millions of us who when somebody does something to us that we feel they ought not to have done or when somebody fails to do something or to treat us the way we feel we ought to have been treated, there are millions of us who say, "Well I know that because Jesus died, God will forgive me my resentment against them and I believe that He will give me love for them." There are millions of us who respond that way.

In other words, there are millions of us who believe Jesus died to cover up the resentment that we feel. And there are some of us, maybe just a few, but there are some of us who when somebody treats us in a way that we feel we ought not to have been treated, or somebody does something that we feel they ought not to have done to us, we immediately accept our position with Jesus on the Cross. Instead of saying Jesus has died for me, we say we died with Jesus and we deserve nothing from anyone as he deserved nothing from anyone and we have no rights to be treated in any special way by anybody and we have only the right to be treated as God allows us to be treated. We accept our position with Jesus in regard to them and, at that moment, the Spirit of God's love fills our hearts for them.

That is the mark of the remnant. Not people who are always believing in Jesus' death to cover up their resentment, but people who are accepting their place with Jesus in dying to the way they think they ought to be treated by other people so that they themselves are filled by God's Spirit, not with resentment but with the inimitable mark of the children of God with perfect love. That's it loved ones, really.

I think there are crowds of us who are using Jesus' death just as the Israelites tried to use God. Using Jesus' death to give us an excuse for continuing to be the kind of people we are. And there are few of us who are seeing that we were crucified with Christ. We see we deserve nothing from anybody and at the moment of confrontation, we accept that and we find a spirit of love flooding our hearts for the other person. That is the mark of the remnant of God. If you're listening to this, honestly, I know that God is at this moment trying to work out that principle of the remnant in you.

He is trying to cut away from you what is unreal in your relationship with Him in order to expose what is real. I would encourage you to look at it plainly and see what you are and become what you can be in him. Let us pray.

Dear Father, many of us are doing the best we can and you know that. We feel we've received certain light about these things and we're doing the best we can. But Lord, we do see that you mean us to be freed from our resentment -- not to be using your dear Son's death to try to get rid of our guilt because we are resentful. You want us to accept our place with him on the Cross and to die with him to the way people treat us and to die to the rights we think we have to be treated in certain ways. And as we embrace him and accept our place with the most precious person in the whole universe, then His Spirit of love will fill our hearts. Instead of coming to you at the end of every day with a list of sins, we'll be coming to you with a list of praises and thanksgiving for the love that you've given us for our colleagues and our friends.

Lord, we thank you for the principle of the remnant and, Lord, we do want to be part of that remnant. We thank you that you do not look only on the outward appearance but you look on the

inward heart. We ask you to look in our hearts. Lord, I ask you to look in mine and to continue to work upon us until we're real people. Lord, enable us to take that stand this very day, this moment. To accept your attitude, Lord Jesus, of dependence on your Father only, and absolute independence of the way people treat us so that we can love them as you do. We ask this in your name for your glory. Amen.