

Judgment

Romans 9:28

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

More and more people were claiming to believe in God and in Jesus than ever before and, you remember, we said that it seemed to be a resurgence of religion rather than a revival of real Christianity. In other words, it seemed to be a renewal of interest in forms of worship and certain thought patterns than it was a case of renewed spirits that were being moved by the Spirit of Jesus.

You remember why we said that we contrasted this so-called revival with real revivals of Christianity down through the centuries. Now whether you look at the revival under Finney here in the United States some years ago, or whether you look at the revival under Wesley in 18th century in England, or whether you look at the revival in the Scottish Hebrides in the 1950s, there is one particular feature that is present in those revivals that isn't present in this so-called revival that we're experiencing.

We symbolized it by the fact that in those revivals, white gloves were presented to the judges and the magistrates of the courts because there were no longer any cases to try. In other words, when great numbers of people are reconciled to their Creator, their morality becomes the same as His and that in turn affects markedly the crime rate in a society. So much so, that normally where there has been a revival of real Christianity, there has been a tremendous decline in the crime rate of that society. That is the easy way to distinguish between a religious revival and a real Christian revival.

The one has a great deal of emphasis on the ways of worship and how to believe and a great deal of talk in sound and fury, the other has a real change of life-- a change of people's behavior so that they become more loving to each other. They become more honest with each other and crime begins to diminish among them. What we did say, you remember, was that we, of course, have a rising crime rate. We don't have a diminishing crime rate; we have a rising crime rate.

We have a unique situation of so-called revival of Christianity co-existing with an increasing crime rate. Of course that's what tells us that even though this current revival of evangelical Christianity may turn into a real revival of Christianity, at the moment, it is just a religious revival--a resurgence of people's interest in certain thought patterns and, a revival of people's interest in certain ways of behavior on Sundays -- but it's not getting into the nitty-gritty of our everyday life yet.

You remember we shared that God nevertheless was in the midst of this situation working out the old principle by which He always deals with us human beings, the principle of the remnant. Out of this huge amorphous mass of people here in the States, rising to millions probably, out of this huge amorphous mass of people that love to read religious books, love to buy religious tapes, love to listen to religious songs, love to go to religious church services, out of that huge mass, God is cutting out a remnant of people who are real in their love for Him and real in their obedience to Him.

God is cutting out a remnant of people -- a small group of people who are really real. It is a small group who love God rather than the machinery of religion. That's where we started, you remember last

day, and maybe you'd look at the verse, loved ones, just to see it. It expresses the principle by which God dealt with the Jews down through the years and it's the principle by which He deals with us in our individual lives and our national lives.

Romans 9:27, "And Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: 'Though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea', [Or though the number of church goers in America be as the sand of the sea], 'Only a remnant of them will be saved.'" We hate that idea, we do -- we just hate it. We think it's un-American, really, or undemocratic or something, but we hate that idea.

We just rebel against the idea that God will discriminate between those who believe and say the right things about Jesus dying for Him and those who are really willing to die with Jesus to their own wishes and their own rights and to become like Him in their lives. We rebel against that idea. We rebel against the idea that God will judge between those of us who use Jesus' death as an excuse for the fact that we're not like God and those of us who use Jesus' death to become like God in our own lives.

We hate that idea. We hate the idea of God discriminating. In fact many of us feel, really, let's face it, God is getting pretty old probably by now and He is probably a bit half-blind anyway and can't see all that's going on. Anyway, He should be pretty grateful that we're moving more or less towards Him without judging us on whether the move is sincere or not.

I think many of us live in that kind of fool's paradise. We hear this kind of verse and we say, "Well, yeah, I see what you're saying that God is selecting out from all of us who say we believe in Him, those who really believe in Him. I see what you're saying that He's trying to select out from all of us who believe in Jesus' death for us as an excuse for sinning in our minds, from those of us who really are willing to die with Jesus to ourselves and our rights and to change and become like God. I see what you're saying but I don't think that it's true. I don't think God is judging our response to Jesus' death. I think He is just happy if He gets any kind of response from us whether it's mental, intellectual, emotional or volitional or whatever. As long as we more or less believe in Jesus' death, I think that's what counts." Really there is not a need for God to select or discriminate and, you know, we human beings don't change.

We were just the same in the first century, we were, and Paul knew that and so in this next verse that we're dealing with today, he hits it squarely on the head, this old nail. Romans 9:28: "For the Lord will execute his sentence upon the earth with rigor and dispatch." We are an inclusive society and we hate any kind of discrimination and therefore, we carry that over to God and we hear that verse and we say, "Oh that's the old hell fury stuff that they used to preach in the old days," but let's face it, we all know that that wasn't original Christianity.

The early Christian preachers were intent on getting people to believe that God would receive them and accept them whatever their lives were like. The early Christian preachers did not preach that there would be judgment. They preached that we should come to God whatever we were like and He would receive us whatever our response was. Well, loved ones, it's just not true, you know, it isn't.

In 40 A.D., Peter, who was really the early Christian preacher, came to Caesarea and he baptized Cornelius and then he said this, "And Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to proclaim that He Himself would be the judge of the living and the dead." Peter said that Jesus has commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead -- that's 40 A.D. Now Jesus died about 29 A.D. so it's only 10 or 11 years after

His death. That's the earliest, most primitive Christianity you can get and Peter is saying, "Jesus told us that He Himself was ordained by God to be judge of the living and the dead and to judge what our response to Him was."

About 11 years later, in Athens, a city of learning and culture where if anybody was going to water down and dilute the more primitive, crude facts of the gospel, then that was the place to do it -- here Paul said, "He has fixed the day on which He will judge the world by a man whom He has appointed and of this, He has given assurance to all men by raising Him from the dead."

So you know, he was tackling the old philosophers who would say in the Greek background there, "Now listen, who said this? Who is saying that there'll be a judgment?" Of course Paul is saying, "Listen, there's only one man who has ever been raised from the dead. There's only one man who has ever left this world and come back again and that's the man who has told us that He will be the one who will judge all of us and our response to Him."

That's important you know, when you sit there or I stand here and think, "Oh does it matter how I respond to Jesus' death? Does it matter whether I regard Him as an excuse from my sins or as a way to be delivered from my sins? Does it matter whether I regard Him as payment for my sins so that I can go on sinning or as a remedy for what causes me to sin? Does it matter?"

Loved ones, Jesus Himself will be the one that judges us as to what our response has been. It matters. It will be the basis of the judgment of the Last Day. Of course, we all love to be literary critics and we love to say, "Well, that was Peter and Paul, but you know we human beings are very fallible, and really, that was their story but you must admit Jesus always Himself said, 'Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' You must admit that Jesus Himself was always positive. He was never trying to pick at us or find out what we were doing right or what we were doing wrong."

Of course, you remember what we read in the New Testament lesson. Jesus said, "Listen, when the son of man comes in His glory and all His angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne and before him will be gathered all the nations and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and He will say to those at His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,' and then He will say to those at His left, 'Depart from Me you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'"

Loved ones, it's just a fact that if you really do listen to Jesus' words, you'll find that He proclaimed very clearly that His Father was not some kind of half-blind old guy that would just be so grateful if we made any move towards him--that He'd accept us whatever our response was.

Jesus implied that there would be a very clear distinction between those of us who took His death, really, in the light of John's song this morning. Who took His death in the light of what the sacrifice meant to Jesus and regarded it as the kingpin of our whole lives -- and those of us who treated it as a free admission ticket into heaven whatever our lives are like. Jesus implied there would be a clear distinction.

Some of us are prone to say, "Oh well, now listen, Jesus was accommodating His words to the Jewish language of the time and the thought patterns so He didn't really believe in a judgment. He just used that thought pattern because that was popular in those days." Do you see what a danger we're in

when we say that? Do you see that we're dealing with the man who was as like God as any man could be like an infinite being in a finite world? That's what we're dealing with when we're dealing with Jesus and really what we're doing is, we're saying that He so accommodated Himself to the times that He told us lies about what would happen after this life is over.

Now brothers and sisters, when you begin to re-interpret history in that way, you begin to make foolishness of history. Jesus spoke often of the judgment in terms that were not metaphorical, in terms that were not symbolic. He often implied, "Listen, I'll say to those at my right hand, come, blessed of my Father, I'll say to those at my left, depart from me you cursed into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." That's pretty plain, straight talking. If we do really listen to Jesus, we'll see that yes, there will be a dividing, there will be a discriminating that will take place.

I think there's a little bit of the lawyer, if the lawyers will forgive me, in every one of us. We kind of like to think -- at least, I did when I was 18 or 19 but -- we always like to find out if there's some kind of way I can get around this thing. Now if this is going to take place, (I know you lawyers don't do that), if this is going to take place at the end of this life, well, okay, maybe 50 years of real happiness and one year of real misery and repentance might do the job. We kind of are interested in this whole business, "Well, all right -- when is this judgment going to take place and then I'll get ready for it", and of course it's really a shock when we hear what the answer is.

Here's what Jesus says, "He who believes in me is not condemned at this moment. He who does not believe is condemned already because He has not believed in the name of the only Son of God", and I suppose I have a particular interest having taught English in the tenses but anyone can see that the verb tenses are all present tenses and then past tenses. But it's, "He who believes in me is not condemned at this moment," Judging is taking place now this morning.

In two ways, the consequences of your sins, consequences of my sins, they judge us this moment. Take a simple little one that we'd hardly regard as a sin. You don't get enough sleep, a little angel throws sand in your eyes in the morning, but you carried it on further to promiscuity and it is followed up by venereal disease. And you go right through all the other things: a temper and a headache. So the judging is taking place now at this very moment, through the consequences of our sins. But in another way the judging is taking place because guilt is the human registration of God's condemning us, really.

Loved ones, I think we have to start getting back to that and stop this business of saying, "Oh, it's false guilt, it's false guilt. My mom, you know, taught me it was always wrong to step on the cracks in the roadway and I am stepping on the cracks and I am getting false guilt."

It's time we stop playing around with every kind of guilt and calling it false guilt. Should we not rather say, "Look, I am feeling a bit uneasy about the wrong impression I gave to that person at work, I am feeling a bit uneasy. There's something inside me that doesn't feel quite right. Boy, it might be false guilt, it might be old Victorian inhibitions or prejudices but, listen, I'll be on the safe side, I'll stop doing it from now on."

Judging is taking place now. You and I are all getting little signals from the way God has made us through our guilt that there's something in us that God is not happy with and loved ones, I would say to you, if you're really serious about responding rightly to Jesus' death, would it not be

better to stop doing a thousand things, whether they were wrong or not, rather than continue with a thousand things because you're not sure whether they're wrong or not? What do you lose if you really do mean that you'll do anything that God wants you to do? And so the judging is taking place now day-by-day.

You and I, every day we have a little bit of uneasiness about a thing or a little bit of a guilt feeling, God is sending us His signal, "Look, that is what will take you to hell if you don't get it out of your life. If you don't take your place with My Son Jesus on the Cross and allow me to destroy that in your life that will eventually destroy you completely." The judging is taking place now.

You remember there's a verse in scripture that says it is appointed for men to die once and then comes the judgment. It's true that after death, the judging ceases. After death there is no longer anymore evidence that we can set before the judge. Then comes death and then comes the judgment.

In other words, it's probable that there is no kind of purgatory where you can improve your chances or you can diminish your chances of receiving God's Spirit and living with Him forever. That judging ceases at death and then you remember, there is that statement that Paul himself used, "He has fixed the day on which He will judge the world." There will be a public day of judgment, when the judgments that have been settled upon us at death are proclaimed before all the people that have ever lived in the universe.

So in a real sense, the judging is taking place now, it ends at death and it will be proclaimed on that final day before all people. Do you see why the disciples of Jesus always said, "Now is the day of salvation"? You sit there and you say, tomorrow, "manana" never comes, never comes. Tomorrow never comes.

You get to tomorrow and then you say, "Tomorrow I will stop. Tomorrow I will stop." At that very moment, you are bringing upon yourself a blindness and an insensitivity that makes it harder for you to say no tomorrow. It is always easier to say yes today or no today, than it will be tomorrow.

Tomorrow is no to God. We like to think, "No, it's a postponement. It's tabling the motion." But tomorrow is no. Really, loved ones, that's what's happening to all of us. At this very moment, if this building exploded at this moment and we all died at this very moment, everything is set, everything is ready, everything is already settled. Lots of you, and I was the same, lots of us like to think, "No, we're in transit. We're on the way to becoming. No, we'll have time. We haven't yet made the decision but we will make it." No, you've really made the decision.

You actually have decided at this moment. Every time your heart is impenitent, every time your heart does not repent, every time you do not fall before Jesus and say, "Lord, I want to take part with you in your death to your rights whatever the cost is to me", every time you hold back a little and say, "Tomorrow I'll decide", you're really saying no and so everything is settled loved ones, at this very moment, it really is.

Some of us say, "Well, what will happen?" I mean some of us are still alive and for instance, Rick Olander is now with God, Bill Wallace is with God, George Olson is with God. There are others of us who have grandmothers and friends and relatives and they're with God and now what happens to them between this time where we are and the time when eventually the judgment will take place? Jesus does indicate from the story of Lazarus that there will be some kind of intermediate state or a waiting

room for heaven and a waiting room for hell where people will still be conscious with memory and feelings. Indeed, Jesus implied, you remember, with Lazarus and the rich man that they would even be able to see one another but there would be a great gulf fixed between them and they would never be able to communicate. Yet, you can sense that even as we talk in that language, we're talking in anthropomorphic terms because Einstein has shown us that actually there is no such thing as time.

It's just one great eternal moment and it's just graying hair and increasing wrinkles that give us a sense of time. But, really, there is no such thing as time. Actually God sees it all as one great eternal moment. So any attempt we make at describing what will happen between now and then is fraught with our anthropomorphisms that do not make too much sense in the philosophical terms but from what Jesus has said, "Yes, today Thou shall be with me in paradise."

You'll come to a place immediately, which is like heaven. It is the anteroom to heaven and you'll be there and you'll have the brightness of heaven but you'll be there until the public day when all judgment is settled upon all peoples that ever lived. Some of us, I think, will accept this kind of thing but I suppose we're always anxious to find the difficulty in it and we'll often say, "Well, do you think the judgment will take place at all when you consider what a complex thing it is?"

I remember, I thought, "Well this idea of judgment is kind of crude because this is a very complex world and it will not take place because it cannot take place fairly", and that was the attitude I had. It will not take place because such a complicated event cannot take place fairly and I used to think, "I have half second thoughts and I can see the Son of Sam [a serial killer], that's plain and obvious. I can see Hitler. I can see Stalin. I can see the big criminals. I can see that their sins are obvious. It's obvious that they have rejected any part in Jesus' death, but I have half second thoughts. They go through my mind like that, just a moment, just a picture. Yeah, the first second is temptation, the second second is my second. I have thoughts that go round and I just have a two-second glimpse of a picture or of an idea or of a thought or of a feeling or a resentment or a criticism or an accusation and it goes in a moment. Now how can there be a fair judgment? I mean I have sinned as really as anybody else has and yet it's gone in a moment."

Of course, Jesus explained it, you know, that there's nothing that is covered up that will not be revealed. There is nothing hidden that will not be made known. Whatever you have whispered in private rooms, will be proclaimed upon the house tops. The fact is that God's Spirit is everywhere and God can see everything that passes in our minds even in a millisecond. God sees everything and knows everything and you know that it's not so much the things, it's not so much actually the evil thought, though that is wrong.

It's not so much the resentful feeling. No, that is wrong but it's the attitude within us that we have towards Jesus on the Cross. That's the sin. It's the unwillingness to be crucified with Him, to die to our own ways and die to our own rights, that's what God sees and, loved ones, God sees every symptom that expresses that, however fast it maybe, however fleeting.

I remember having real trouble with the other difficulty, "Well, how can a judgment be fair if some of us walk through the gates of heaven and just touch a cap, say, "I believe in Jesus", okay, walk through and others of us have to lay our whole lives before God in detail so that every act and every word is examined. I used to feel, "Well boy, that's easy. I'll just learn the words 'I believe in Jesus' and I am through." And I thought, "There's something ridiculous about that. There's something unfair about it".

Loved ones, do you see that's not it at all? They're strong words and you'll remember that Luther himself was surprised at -- but they're there in James and in fact it might be good if you want to look at them.

James 2:24, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." You remember James earlier on says, "You say I have faith and He says show me your works and then I'll be able to see whether you have faith or not", or you remember the way he puts it, "I by my works will show you my faith".

In other words, there is no using Jesus' death to cover up our sinful works. The purpose of Jesus' death was to deliver us from ourselves so that we could produce works that are pleasing to God and that's why James says, "A man is justified by works and not by faith alone".

In fact, these are strong words, loved ones, that Paul uses. He says, "He will render to every man according to his works, to those who by patience and well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give eternal life but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, for every human being who does evil, He will give tribulation and distress but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, for God shows no partiality."

So every one of us here who are in Jesus, will be expected to show a life that proves that we are in Jesus, a life that is filled with the Spirit of Jesus' love, a life that is filled with Jesus' own penitent heart, a life that is filled with Jesus' own purity. That's why Jesus died so that we could be delivered from the things that prevent us from being like God. Indeed there's another verse that says that we will have to give account for every careless word we utter. "For by your words, you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned."

So, loved ones, there'll be no easy line, there'll be no turn-stile where you don't have to show your life. Every one of us will have to express by our works and our lives, the faith, the oneness with Jesus that we have accepted in our everyday lives today here on earth. So, all of us will be judged in the same way.

I used to think, "Oh yeah, well, I suppose I'll have a harp, and you'll burn and need asbestos clothing", and all that kind of stuff. I remember at college, we used to make fun of the whole idea because it seemed so ridiculous and it is true that Jesus does try to represent to us how unbearable hell will be. He likens it to a lake of fire, to outer darkness, to a second death. But the worst thing about it is what Paul says: that we will be excluded from the presence of the Lord and we'll be excluded from the person who gives light to the sunrises and the sunsets.

We'll be excluded from the presence of the one who makes smiles and jokes. We'll be excluded from the one who has made the breezes and the oceans and the rivers. We'll be excluded from the one who has made love and joy and peace. We'll be excluded from His presence and therefore we will experience none of those things and probably, loved ones, it will be like Sartre's picture in his play 'No Exit' you remember. It will be very like that.

You remember those three people, one was a homosexual, I think, and the other was paranoid and the other had some incredible anti-social trait in him -- and hell suddenly dawned upon them. It goes on, you remember, through the play after several hours it seems and several days for them of staying together and they at last say why, "Why doesn't the light go out?" And there's one electric light bulb in the center of the room and then it suddenly dawns upon them, the light never goes out. The

electric light bulb is there all the time and they are going to burn in their own lusts and hatreds and criticisms of each other forever.

That's why Jesus says that we will be excluded from the presence of the Lord and will be given over to eternal destruction. Not that God will destroy us but we'll continue to destroy each other and ourselves by our own lack of love. Heaven, streets of gold, well, Jesus tries to represent it to us you know, as a place of light, a great city, a great marriage feast where there'll be lots and lots of people who have a great oneness with each other. He likens it to a garden where there'll be lots of fresh life but the great thing about it is that we will always be with the Lord and we shall see Him as He is and we shall share His glory and reflect His glory.

In other words, there will be a great group of people who are like Jesus and when you've got millions and millions of people who treat each other as Jesus does, there you've got paradise. That's what Jesus says it will be. There'll be no need of light there because God Himself will be present and He will provide all the light that is needed and He will wipe away all tears from all eyes. It will be continual, full understanding and joy and interaction with each other and love.

So, loved ones, yes, there will be a judgment and it will be definite and clean and clear. The issues may look vague to us but in God's eyes they are very plain. I have allowed My Son to die and I have put all of your selfishness in Him so that you can be delivered from it if you're willing. Now, are you willing? If you're not willing, I cannot make you. I cannot draw to myself those who are not willing to be drawn and that's the flaw in universalism, you know.

Certainly God wants us all to draw to Him but, you know, you cannot love a person against their wills. So, in a real way, today is another day of salvation for you, really. In a real way, today you make a decision. You love to think you don't make a decision because you put off the decision. But putting off the decision is making the decision and you yourself have to decide at this moment, "Am I going to continue to use Jesus' death as an excuse for my sinning and as a comfort to myself that I don't need to live like Him or am I going to enter into Jesus' death with Him and come close to Him and embrace Him and become the same kind of person as He Himself is?"

Really, the decision is once again yours. You don't make it up here in your head; you make it with your life, today. You change today. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, You certainly have made it plain to us by your own words that you are concerned about how we respond to your death and that unless we respond to it in a way that changes our lives, we've rejected you as really as the Pharisees rejected you. We thrust a sword into your side as really as the Roman soldier.

Lord, we thank you for making it plain to us. We thank you for making it plain to us how to accept your death in reality -- to see that we ourselves were crucified with you on that Cross. That actually it was we who died. You died for us, therefore all of us have died and that we died to what we have hoped to get out of our lives. You destroyed there our right to demand anything from anybody except from You Yourself and that if we are willing to accept that death to ourselves and death to demanding love from others, You will give us a love that is beyond anything that we have ever experienced and You will implant in our hearts Your own Spirit.

Lord Jesus, I pray for any loved one this morning who needs to make that decision, pray that they'll go to the prayer room or they'll sit in their seats and make it quietly and then live as people who

have been brought from death to life, for Your glory.

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 coming week and forever more. Amen.