

The End of Strain

Romans 10:4

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I thought you might like to see today's verse in the Greek language in which God originally revealed it to Paul. Perhaps, loved ones, you would like to turn to it first as it appears in our own English Bible; and it is Romans 10:4: "For Christ is the end of the law, that every one who has faith may be justified." That is it in English, and in the more than 4000 Greek manuscripts that we have of the New Testament, the verse appears like this: *Telos gar nomou Christos eis dikaiosunen panti to pisteuonti.* You see it would translate like that: "End, for, of law, Christ, for righteousness, to all, believing." Of course in our English language we would change the order around. We would say, "For Christ (and then substitute the word "is") is the end of law for righteousness to" or "for all who believe."

And all I would point out to you is that this – "telos" – "the end" -- is placed in front of the sentence. We place it further back in English. It was placed in the front of the sentence by God because he is saying, "This is the important thing that I want to say to you. Christ is the end of law." That is the big thing. It ties up with the middle clause in the previous verse. Do you see verse 3? You see the clause, "seeking to establish their own". Seeking to establish their own righteousness. Well, God is saying that Christ is the end of all that kind of thing. The end of all that business. The end of the law. And you see too that there is no "the" before *nomou*, "late". There is no "the", so it doesn't mean the Ten Commandments that Moses gave us. It doesn't mean that Christ was the end of The Law. That is how they referred to the Ten Commandments. But Christ is the end of any law, any principle of law, people who seek to justify themselves to themselves and to God.

You can see why, the more that you study this dear Word, the more respect you have that God's Spirit inspired not only every word but the very order of the words. It seems the more deeply that you go into this Word the more harmony and beauty that you see in it. You begin to see that everything is carefully chosen. Nothing goes in by chance. And some of you, of course, may say, "Oh, well, "justify" doesn't appear at all in the Greek." Well, it doesn't, but the same stem "*dikaio-*" the noun comes from is the same stem that forms the verb "justify". So they both really mean the same. So, in fact, the English translates it, "For Christ is the end of the law that everyone who has faith may be justified." It means "for righteousness" or "for justification to everyone who believes."

So, loved ones, I thought you might like to see it in Greek -- both so that you know what it looks like and so that you begin to see how carefully we need to look at God's Word. Because every word is carefully chosen by his Spirit, and even the very position of the words is carefully planned by him. That is why Jesus said not an iota or a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. An iota in Hebrew is very like this letter here. It is an "i", you see, and you put it under the letter. That is an iota in Greek, a little letter like that, it is like an apostrophe. And Jesus said not even a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. It is just good to see that what we need to do is to pay attention to this Word and take care of it.

Now you see what God is saying: "For Christ is the end of law for righteousness to everyone who believes." What is the "law for righteousness"? In other words, what is law righteousness? What is

it to be justified by law?

Well, all we bachelors will understand this illustration; none of you ladies will. Gentlemen, have you ever invited your relatives to dinner some evening, and just as you were setting out the glassware, horror of horrors, your glasses were spotted by the dishwasher! Now, brothers, have you ever been in that position? You know how worried you get and how terror struck you become about what your relatives are going to think of your homemaking ability! Or have you ever seen a romance just crumble because you have not drowned yourself in Listerine, or blasted yourself with Binaca, or because you haven't bounced your hair right off your head with some shampoo? Or have you ever had sand kicked in your face by a nine-stone weakling? Well, you know we all laugh at those things. We think that those executives on Madison Avenue just have to be dumb. They have to be, producing such silly commercials. Naturally, they know we will all see through them. They have to know that.

Well, of course they do. They know that. They know that they are talking to a very small group of people who have those specific problems. And they know that we are not all concerned with being poor homemakers because we make bad coffee or because our glasses are spotted from the dishwasher. They know that we are not all concerned about losing a wife or husband because our hair doesn't bounce or spring or because our breath is bad. They know that. They know we are not all concerned because we haven't the greatest muscles in the world. They know that. They make the commercials almost purposely ridiculous because they realize that we all see through them. We all laugh at them.

But they know that behind each laughing face is a little heart that wants to look right in the eyes of its peers. They know that behind every laugh at their commercials there beats a little heart that desperately wants to look right in the eyes of its friends and in the eyes of other people. They know that little heart, however casually it is doing it, is noting down any new characteristics that it can find of the modern 20th century man or woman, so it makes sure that those characteristics are found in its life. They know that. In other words, they realize that we maybe don't have the problems they are talking about, but they know that we are concerned to be the kind of people that others want us to be.

They know that many of us, deep down, feel that we are not very nice people, that we are not worth a dime. But they know also there is a determination inside to make ourselves nice people, and to be worth a dime. That is why books like "I'm OK, You're OK" sell so well -- because here is someone telling us we are nice. We don't really believe it, but they are telling us we are nice. I'm OK; it is OK to be like we are. So we have books that deal with the inside feeling that we are not worth anything, and then we have other books that list more and more things that we can do to make ourselves appear worth something in the eyes of other people. Inside we are trying to battle the fact that we are not nice; outside we are trying to make ourselves nice. There is that battle that goes on all the time in our lives, a consciousness that we are not very nice people and yet a desire to somehow change that by making ourselves nice. A feeling that we are not really worth much, but a desire, on the other hand, to try to make ourselves worth something to the people we know and to our friends.

Probably all of us here have heard that voice inside us saying, "You ought to prefer other people to get the new car rather than you getting it. You ought to prefer that other people get a good husband rather than that you get a good husband. You ought to prefer and be glad that other people have got a satisfying job rather than you getting a satisfying job." But there is something inside

us that is continually glad when we get the good husband, when we get the good car, and that we are not in the position of the other people who didn't. There is something inside us that resents it when we don't get the good husband or the good car or the satisfying job. The more our conscience tells us what we should be like, the more aware we are that we are not like that. We want to be, and yet we cannot be.

What we do is, we take the second best. We say, "I'm not the way that I think I should be inside, and I really don't think I am worth a dime; but all right, if I can get all of the other people to think I am good, that will make up for it. If I can get all of the other people in the world to think that I am worth something, that will make up for this terrible sense of worthlessness that I have inside." So, that is what we do. We can't satisfy the standard that we have inside ourselves for ourselves, so we give up those standards and we say, "Well, I can't be that." Then we make up a whole new set of standards of things other people want to see in us.

Of course it is killing. It is a life of despair. You keep on getting more hurdles that you have to leap over. You keep on having to win more games, more matches, beat more people, look different to other people, wear better clothing, do better at the typewriter, do better on the golf course. You are constantly getting new hurdles that you have to leap over because inside you are becoming more and more aware of your own worthlessness and your own ugliness. Yet you can see the more external laws that you add and you try to live by, the more irksome the whole situation becomes, because it doesn't seem to do anything to destroy this terrible ugliness inside. And so you are all the time getting up each morning much like in that poem we have quoted so often:

"Oh, often have I washed and dressed, and what's to show for all my pain?
Let me lie abed and rest; ten thousand times I've done my best,
and all's to do again."

Day after day you get up, trying to live up to the things you think you should live up to. Trying to be the swinger that you think everybody wants you to be. Trying to be the efficient person that everybody wants you to be. Trying to keep up appearances. Loved ones, it is really not unlike the situation with a corpse. The corpse lies dead, putrefying; inside and outside the staff of the funeral parlor are trying to apply cosmetics to make it appear alive. But of course, all the cosmetics in the world aren't going to have any effect on the decay that is going on inside. Indeed, the more the putrefying effects of decay expand and extend inside, the more cosmetics are necessary on the outside. Yet they aren't having any effect on the other at all.

That is what living by law is. It doesn't matter if it is God's law, or whether it is a psychologist's law, or whether it is your own law. Living by law is not actually a matter of which law you live by; it is an attitude of your heart. It is the feeling, "I'm not worth a dime and I'm really not nice, but boy, I don't want the others to see that I can't do anything about those two things.... I'm going to try to make them think that I am nice. I am going to try to make them feel that I am worth something." It is a charade that many of us strain to keep playing day after day.

The key would be to have a miracle that would destroy and stop the putrefying effects of decay inside the corpse. Do you see why Christ is the end of law, the finish of law as far as righteousness is concerned? Do you see that? Because the truth is that your miserable ugliness, your old ugly self, was put into Christ by our Creator and was destroyed in Christ. That is the way the Bible puts it. It says, "palaios hemon anthropos". "Palaios" is "old", "anthropos" is "man", and "hemon" is "our" -- the old man or woman that we used to be before Christ died. Christ died at

least 1900 years ago, and indeed, in God's world of eternity where infinity and relativity meet, Christ died before the creation of the world and you died with him. All that you used to be, with your worthlessness and your unpleasantness, has been destroyed in Jesus. All that he now has received from his Father, you receive. You have all the power that Jesus has, and you have all the life that he has. Because God said, "Your old self was crucified with my Son that you yourself might not be enslaved to sin." Do you see that the last phrase is important? In Greek it was "to pisteuonti" – "to anyone who believes". And indeed the word is "panti" -- "to all who believe" -- so it is true to everyone who believes. To all of us here who believe that God has done that for us, it becomes real. The old self is destroyed and we are made new inside.

What have you to believe? Believe first of all the voice of your conscience, that you apart from Jesus are not worth a dime. Stop fighting that one, because you can't beat that. You actually are not worth a dime. If we melted you down we would get maybe a dollar for you. Apart from Jesus, apart from your Maker, you are not worth a dime. You will go out like a light after seventy years. Believe and listen to the voice of conscience when it begins to point out attitudes that are wrong, attitudes where you see that there is a lack of that loving self-sacrificing concern for others that Jesus had. Believe your conscience.

Believe secondly that God has put you as you used to be in his Son Jesus and has destroyed you there, and that all that Jesus has died to, you died to. You don't need to do it. You don't need to crucify yourself, you don't need to commit suicide, you don't need to try to destroy the old self yourself. Believe that it has already happened, and that you have died to all that Jesus died to. As he died to the insults of the Roman soldiers, you have died. His victory is yours. As he died to what people thought of him, to the fact that his relatives thought of him as a failure, you have died to it, too. Accept that by faith. Accept also that what he has been resurrected to, you have been resurrected to also. All that he now has at the right hand of God his Father is yours. Health is yours. Peace is yours. Victory over difficulties day by day is yours. Believe that by faith. That is what believing is -- believing that what God has said is true.

And last of all, be in accordance with that. That is what "belief" is, two Anglo-Saxon words: "be" and "leifan". "Be in accordance with" that. Stop straining to make an impression on the rest of us. Stop trying to live up to all kinds of silly little things that you think we all want you to be, or that you want to appear before us. Relax before the Holy Spirit and allow him to reveal to you the resurrection of Jesus' Spirit that he wants to make real in you this day. You don't have to fight tomorrow or the next day. Just today. The Holy Spirit is trying to reveal to you some new part of yourself that has been crucified already with Jesus and completely renewed in him, and he wants that to become part of you. He wants to give it to you.

First, you must see what he is showing you. And that is what it means to believe the voice of conscience. Believe Romans 6:6, that you have in fact been crucified and remade in Jesus, and that if you are a part of Jesus, you are part of the most worthy and most valuable person in the universe. And thirdly, act in accordance with that. Stop straining, stop living by law. Stop leaping over hurdles. Relax on the operating table that God has placed in his Son Jesus and allow the Holy Spirit to lovingly cut out the death and the decay in you and replace it with the life of Jesus' Spirit. "Christ is the end of law -- the finish of law -- as far as righteousness is concerned for all who believe." I pray that some of us will be among those this day.

Let's pray.

Dear Father, I pray that by your Holy Spirit, you will reveal to each loved one here, the truth of your word, and that you will bring somebody into freedom this day, that somebody will relax this day, will rest back, will say at last Lord, I am not worth a dime apart from Jesus, and I am not nice I am ugly inside, and oh! I thank you that you have destroyed that in Jesus and oh! Holy Spirit, I ask you to reveal to me the part that you want to destroy and make real and alive in me this day. Amen.