

## By Grace Through Faith

Romans 11:20

by Ernest O'Neill

Would you, personally, answer this question? Look at your index finger; when did you make it? You say, "Well, you know fine well I didn't make it -- I just found it there at the end of my arm. It has always been there, I've always had it." Then I say to you, "Why do you call it yours?" and you say, "It's part of my arm and that's why I call it mine." And I say, "Your arm?" You say, "Don't start that all over again. It is my arm. I didn't make it, but it's like my eyes and my ears and my brain and everything -- they just came with the territory and that is why I call them mine." "Well then, did your mom and dad make them?"

It doesn't matter how clever your parents were; you know that the thing that amazed them when you were born was that a complex little mental and physical personality like you could come out of their body. They had no doubt at all that they didn't make you. Yet loved ones we do treat all this equipment that we have as undeniably ours don't we? We certainly use it that way; our eyes look where we want them to look; our hands do what we want them to do, our legs walk where we want them to walk. We treat them very much as ours to do what we want with. Actually, isn't it true that we do the same thing with the rest of the world? We pick flowers that we didn't make, we cut down trees that we didn't plant, we buy and sell land that we didn't make; we pollute oceans that we don't own. We treat the whole world as, in a sense, belonging to us. Yet this old world insists on blowing an odd volcano from time to time to let us know that it isn't really ours and that we are here only at the pleasure and the will of whoever does own the whole thing.

It is interesting, we human beings are not even fiddlers on our own roof; we are fiddlers on somebody else's roof. We are set on this globe or sphere of matter that charges through space at thousands of miles an hour and we have no idea what keeps it going. We have no idea how it got here and we have little idea how long it's going to last. Loved ones, that is why so many of us human beings are neurotic; we know fine well how we would feel if we were in a house and we didn't know who owned it and we didn't know how long we were to have it. We know how we'd feel if the clothes on our backs belonged to somebody else -- we didn't know to whom -- but he might come at anytime and take them. We know how uncertain and neurotic we would be if we were in that situation in physical, natural terms, here on earth, and yet that's the way we are. We say, "My hands, MY eyes, MY ears, MY body, MY clothes," and we didn't make any of them. That is why we are neurotic. That is why we feel rootless at times. That is why we, at times, wonder who we are and where we came from.

That might even explain the popularity of the book *Roots*; it isn't so much a desire on our part to trace our roots back to the old country as it is a great desire to know why we are here, or what we are doing, or who owns this whole thing. That is why so many of us are on tranquilizers and so many of us are insecure in our lives. It is patently obvious to anyone who looks, that everything we have has been given to us and we have made nothing ourselves. Some of us say, "Yes, you are so right; that is exactly it. If this world would only realize there is a Supreme Being and that he made all of this and that he alone has a right to decide how it is to be used! We all need to realize that these are his hands, this is his finger, these are his eyes, these are his bodies and he alone has the right to decide what to do with them. If we only believed that, then our neuroses would disappear and we would at last feel at home in this world."

But the insane fact is that there are many of us involved in the Christian religion, in Buddhism, in Islam and other religions who do believe there is a Supreme Being. We do believe there is a God that made all this and we do believe he has the right alone to use these things, and yet we cannot let go of them. There are many of us here who have no doubt that we were made by a loving Father and he has the right to use these hands and feet as he wants them used. And yet, try as we will, we cannot allow these hands to be used each day as he wants them to be used. We find we are like squatters who have squatted on somebody else's property, and we cannot get rid of the attitude of the robber or the pirate who wants to use the things that he has gotten -- for himself -- for his own purposes and his own time.

Loved ones, you probably find the same thing as I found in my life; that it shows itself in two basic attitudes. One--you feel everybody revolves around you: you are the sun and all the planets. That is -- all the rest of the three and-a-half billion of us revolve around you -- this is really your universe. Isn't that why you get irritated when the phone call comes at the wrong moment -- because the god of the universe is on his way out shopping! Or why somebody has the audacity to dent your car? There seems to be, inside, a whole attitude that we need to defend ourselves. We say, "It is self-preservation.," except we know it goes beyond the bounds of self-preservation; it goes to the bounds of annihilating every other self so that we can live. We say this is reasonable, but we live as if we are the gods of the universe and this universe circles around us. Isn't that why we get impatient or irritable when the phone call comes at the wrong moment or some other nuisance takes place? We feel it has no right to; it ought not to happen.

It's strange that at the other end of our being we have the other attitude that feels "No, this world doesn't belong to me -- I don't own it, it isn't mine, and therefore I have to grab as much of it as I can on the way through." That is what makes us so anxious and fretful. That is what makes us so worried about next week or the week after. The bank balance is okay now, but what is it going to be like next month? We have that kind of grabbing attitude to the world. In fact it spoils the whole exercise of our own abilities because we find ourselves using them to grab as much as we can on the way through. We are neurotic people: we have this attitude on the one hand that we own the universe, and yet in our heart of hearts we know we don't own it. Or we have the other attitude that we had better grab as much as we can as we go through.

Loved ones, how can you get free from that neurosis? Let's look at Luke 2:49. It's the time when Jesus was about twelve years old and Mary and Joseph had taken him to Jerusalem. They lost him on the way back and they retraced their steps to find him, and found him in the temple discussing with the doctors of theology. "And he said to them, 'How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?'" The word "house" isn't in the Greek. The word in the Greek is "tois." Jesus literally said, in Aramaic I presume, "Did you not know that I would be in my Father's things?" "Tois" is the word for the article, and those of you who do some language study know that it is used for the neuter plural or the neuter singular to mean "thing." That is what Jesus said: "Why were you worried about me? Didn't you know I would be among my Father's things? Didn't you know that I wouldn't be lost? I'm at home among the things my Father has made. I don't feel they are alien to me. He used me to make them; by me all things were made and without me was not anything made that was made. Don't worry about me -- I don't feel these things are alien; this is my world and I feel at home in it."

Isn't it true that Jesus didn't feel the need to grab at things as he went through? He did seem to be at home in this world -- it held no terrors for him. Leprosy wasn't something that threw him off

balance. The death of Lazarus wasn't something that he suddenly felt was alien and an enemy for him to face. Even the thought of his own torture on the cross didn't throw him out of the peace that he had. Nothing was alien to him in this world; he took it all in his stride as a matter of course, because these are his Father's things. This is his world and he feels at home in it -- he feels satisfied with it. He was unlike us, loved ones; he wasn't worried as we are, about whether we will have enough strength to meet tomorrow because we don't seem to have it in our hands today. He wasn't like that; he wasn't fretting and anxious about whether he would have enough to see him through the week, he wasn't concerned about what people could do to him in this world; he walked in complete peace all the time. He seemed to have a life and power that he was able to inject into every situation he came into. He was actually able to transform the world: he changed the stormy water into calm water; he changed the dead Lazarus into a living man; he changed withered leprous flesh into healthy flesh. Wherever he came, he was at home in his Father's things. So he wasn't at all like you and me; he had no trouble with trying to lord it over everybody else -- trying to pretend that it was his world, because it WAS his world.

And at the other end of the scale he had no feeling that he had to grasp what he could on the way through because he needed it. He was absolutely certain that his Father would supply him with everything that he needed as he went along. So really, he was in a beautiful situation; he was free to be himself, free to be natural and to do the things that he was able to do without trying to use them to make himself secure and safe. Wouldn't that be the way to live -- with absolute faith that your Creator knew that you were here and that he would give you everything you needed day by day, and that you didn't have to fret or be anxious, didn't have to grab at things, didn't have to lord it over other people. And at last you began to feel at home in this world; at peace and at rest in it, knowing it was a friendly place and not a hostile place.

How can you live like that? Well, nobody can live like that besides the one person who made this place: only Jesus can live that way. Every time you and I try to live that way, we end up falling flat on our faces with a sense of falling short, or of in some way failing to reach the ideal we had in mind. The only person that can live like that is Jesus, and that is the clue to our answer: the only one is Jesus. Jesus Christ, in the first century, was simply an expression, the most perfect expression, of a cosmic Christ-life that exists in every generation. In other words, just as there is in this world an independent, unbelieving spirit that is always striving and grabbing, always insecure and trying to establish its own status, so there is a beautiful, dependent spirit of life that runs like a stream through every century of the earth's existence. That is a Spirit of life, the life of the cosmic Christ that trusts God and feels at home in this world and treats the world in the way it was meant to be treated. Here is the incredible miracle: just as you were born of your mom and inherited from her all those old neurosis, all the insecurity -- half the feeling that the world is mine and everybody ought to do that I want, half the feeling that it is not mine and I have to grab all I can on the way through -- so a miracle took place in the cosmic, timeless, spaceless realm of God when he ingrafted you into this cosmic Christ.

He did loved ones. That is what this verse in 2 Corinthians 5:14 means: "we are convinced that one has died for all: therefore all have died." You were ingrafted into that Christ-Spirit, "For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." Romans 6:5.

God ingrafted all of us even before we were born into this Christ-Spirit that was expressed by Jesus when he said to his parents, "Did you not know that I would be at home in my Father's things?" You sense that Spirit at times. The naturalists have turned it into a religion because there are

moments when you lie beside a lake and you feel a oneness with the universe. There are times when you are sitting beside a river or a stream and you feel a unity with the stream and the river and with everything around you. There are moments when things seem to go exactly as they were meant to go. Indeed those moments come, not only when outward things are good, but also when everything is bad, and yet you feel a peace and a quietness that seems supernatural. Loved ones, you have been ingrafted into that Christ, and you are able to experience that every moment of the day by simply believing and by beginning to trust that Spirit that you sense within you.

That is why Paul says what he says in Romans 11:20. He begins in verse 19: "You will say, 'Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.'" Then in verse 20: "That is true. They were broken off because of their unbelief," Paul says in this case the Jews did not believe that they had been grafted into Jesus. When he came onto the scene of time and space many of them disbelieved it. That is why as branches they were broken off that Christ-life. Then he goes on to say: "but you stand fast only through faith." You experience that Christ-life in your own life by faith, so don't be proud; don't think that you yourself have brought about this. It is because God the Creator grafted you into his son's Christ-life that runs through every century. That is why you feel the tingling of that in your own life, from time to time. It's because of what he has done that through faith you are able to experience it today.

In other words, it's as if you are in a room filled with poisonous gases and you are just about to go under when a loudspeaker in the wall booms out and says, "Lift that mask that you see hanging by the wall -- it has a mixture of oxygen in it. Breathe it and you will live." You believe the voice, and you lift the mask, and you put it over your face, and you begin to breathe. Not only do you live, but you live better than you ever lived before. That is what it is, loved ones --- a faith in Jesus' life and his Spirit moving in you. If you try to do it on your own, it will just be the mess that it has been for the past number of years. The only way you can be at home in this world is if the son of God that made this world actually lives within you and if you allow him to share that feeling of being at home with you. That is the only way. Otherwise you will continually be scared stiff when you hear the word cancer -- your little heart will just beat and beat to death. Or you will continually be scared stiff when you think the recession is going to go deeper. Or you will continue to be worn out with fear and anxiety every time you see that you made a mistake in the check stubs. You will continue to be a little neurotic who is wafted this way and that, unless the one who owns the universe — Jesus and his Spirit — lives inside you and you allow him to do what he wants with your life.

I don't know if you look at birds, but it is amazing with what certainty they move; the bird just swoops down on the water and it adds to the beauty of the scene. That is why you are here — to add to the beauty of the scene. But it can only be if the same dear Spirit that moves through the beauties of this world moves in your life, and you give up living it for yourself to get what you can out of it. I pray that some of you will glimpse that this morning and that somebody here will stop trying to grab for themselves and will begin to let this Spirit of Jesus govern their lives. If you do, you'll be able to say, "Didn't you know I wouldn't be lost, that I'd be at home here in my Father's things and in his world?"

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we have often thought that in some way this world could be our home. But Lord we've often felt we are usurpers. We've often felt we are renters; here under sufferance because we've

grabbed these fingers and these hands you've given us and used them for ourselves and our own purposes. So we've always felt one step away from you; we've always felt out of step in some way with your universe. Lord, we want to be in step. Father we want to live in this world as you planned us to; using it and not abusing it. Not using it for ourselves, but adding to it and giving to it and transforming it with your own beauty. So Lord Jesus, if you are alive this morning, Lord, will you come into our lives this morning? And if you know how to live this life of mine, will you live it Lord. And we will begin to listen to your voice and begin to get a line on what you want to do with us. Lord Jesus, we would ask you now to come in and bring that dear Spirit of yours into us, that will immediately make us feel at home in our Father's world. We ask this for your glory. And now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.