

God's Justice

Romans 11:21

by Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever had this kind of frustrating experience in your life -- it usually occurs in a personal relationship: suddenly the husband and wife or the roommates are verbally at each other's throats; arguing like mad and tearing each other apart. Eventually they grow so tired that they simmer down and then begin to talk. They elucidate all kinds of misunderstandings that have gradually built up between them over the past weeks. They analyze the actual cause of the argument and pinpoint it precisely; and then, tragedy of tragedies, even though they can both see exactly why it happened they cannot create in the other person the same attitude that they have on the issue. They cannot create in the other the exact flavor of life that will enable them to live together as one person. So they have to chalk up yet another one on the lengthening list of subjects that from now on they must walk gingerly around as long as they live together.

Have you ever had that experience? It is so frustrating because you feel that if you can get the thing under the microscope, you can almost get me to agree exactly with you in the analysis of the problem. Yet having analyzed it completely, you still feel we are miles away from each other on it and there is no guarantee that we won't have this fight all over again in two weeks time. It is interesting that understanding a thing or analyzing it, talking about it or communicating with each other about it, only seems to be able to deal with some of the problems that arise in our personal relationships; it seems only to be able to deal with those problems that arise from miscommunication or misunderstanding. But wouldn't you agree that the more serious conflicts, the more serious business problems, are not affected at all however much you analyze them and discuss them? How ever much understanding you come into with one another about them, it still doesn't seem to deal with the situation -- mainly because it doesn't change the situation.

Somehow the daughter still is determined to live with the older man even though he is married and has three children, and the roommate still plays acid rock at 6:30 AM at 40 decibels. The husband still ignores your feelings even though he knows that's the problem. Isn't that true, loved ones that the more serious problems in our lives; be they personal conflicts or business or financial problems; the more serious ones are not affected by our simply knowing what is wrong or understanding it fully?

The reason is, of course, that knowledge can't add anything to a situation. Knowledge itself can't change heart attitudes, can't change wills, and can't change circumstances. Knowledge itself can simply analyze and clarify and understand. Knowledge itself doesn't add any new element to a situation. I don't know that there are any of us who have not lived enough years in business relationships or in domestic relationship and have not found ourselves covering exactly the same ground, coming to exactly the same oneness of understanding about why the problem arose--and yet three or four weeks down the line, we are back in the same situation.

Loved ones that is why our Creator said we would die if we ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That is why he said, "If you try to live this life of yours simply by your knowing what's right and wrong, simply by your knowing what is and what should be, simply by knowing what is good and what is evil; if you try to live your life by your ability to understand, explain and analyze

things, you will eventually end up, if that is your only power, facing one another in divorce court or internationally looking at each other from behind rows of inter-continental missiles."

Isn't that where we find ourselves? The days of the League of Nations are so far back in Neanderthal times that we laugh at it. The UN is a joke now and the whole idea of being a world citizen is something that we left back there in those optimistic days of the twenties. The tragedy is that even in domestic and military situations, confrontation rather than harmony is the order of the day. Even though we are more organized to live together in peaceful communities than our forefathers ever were, we can't find a peaceful community. Even Miami (Florida) -- that is in a heavenly physical situation -- becomes the very epitome of our inability to get on with each other.

Loved ones, the truth is that the tree of knowledge actually doesn't do a thing. It doesn't change anything in most of the problems that we come up against. It deals only with some very superficial problems. Let's go, for instance, to a real historical situation in 1440 B.C. Come with me onto a promontory on the edge of the Red Sea. The water is rolling with massive waves and on this promontory stands one bearded man and around him are more than half a million men, women and children with ox carts and every means of conveyance that you can imagine, piled with tables, chairs, clothing and animals. They are right on the edge of that promontory, the Red Sea is right behind them, they have their backs up against it, and in front of them is the elite chariot corps of the Egyptian army, over six hundred of those chariots plus hundreds of other chariots, and they are moving towards them with drawn weapons. It doesn't matter what that old man Moses comes up with on his computer -- it doesn't! He can computerize his options like mad; he can draw up his curves of probability -- it doesn't matter how thoroughly he analyzes that situation; knowledge, understanding, and analysis will do nothing for him in that situation because he needs some new element coming into the problem.

Loved ones, that is what most of us need in those situations where we talk about a rock and a hard place: we need a new element, something new coming in, some new light coming in from behind. We, of course, try to get along with yet more analysis. All we actually do is back all the men, women, children and ox carts up to about three feet of water, and then we calculate how much deeper they can go and still keep their noses above water. That is why our lives often are just poorly disguised retreats. That is why we are so often in the situation of the guy who was beating his wife. When asked, "Have you stopped beating your wife?" he said, "No, but I have been visiting the psychologist and now I know why I'm beating her."

That is so often the situation in our lives isn't it? We can explain why we are here; we can analyze it completely; we understand all about it, we know what should be, and yet our lives are continuing to retreat. In other words, we refuse to see the reality of Moses' situation. In actual fact, at that moment what he needed was a completely new element that would change the situation. Maybe you'd look at what happened in Exodus 14:16: "Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea. And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen." Then the actual event, verse 21: "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left."

That is the only way this life will work. The way you and I play at it; nibbling at the tree of

knowledge, understanding it and analyzing it and trying to manipulate the circumstances, and manipulating one factor against another, won't work! It doesn't matter how many problem factors you manipulate against how many other problem factors; you end up with side effects that are not a cure or a remedy and are not life as it is meant to be. In other words we will end up in the same problem as we eventually end up with in so many of our medical treatments: we deal with a particular disease and end up with so many side effects that we have to start all over again. Actually the only way to live life in this world is to believe that Jesus, the son of our Creator, the Spirit of creative life that made the Red Sea split, is alive, and that you and I are in him -- much as we used to be in our mother's womb. We are in him and he is able to inject that Spirit of creative life that holds the molecules of this world together into all kinds of situations in our lives -- he is actually able to rearrange the molecules. He who first made them -- who first created them -- he is able to change them and alter them so that the situation is radically different from what it is at the moment. That's the only way in which we can live in this world and it is the way we are meant to live in this world.

In other words loved ones, if we don't live by this tree of life, by receiving from this Christ by whom all things were made and without whom was not anything made that was made, receiving from him through our faith this life that originally created the world and receiving it into the situations of our lives, there will be no change. The tragedy with most of our lives is not that knowledge is bad, but that we are trying to live this life by the force of our own knowledge and all we are doing is rearranging the problem; we are not actually changing it. What we need to do is not to analyze, examine, talk, or communicate more, though I'm sure we should do all those things, but the vital thing we need to do is exercise faith like Moses did in that situation, so that we are able to receive new creative life from God. Our lives weren't made to run as if God no longer existed -- he hasn't given up the business of changing things and that's the only way our lives will work.

Actually we are the ones who are to bring that life into this world. The dogs can't, the birds are beautiful, the animals are lovely, but little worms, insects or caterpillars can't bring this life of God into this world. You and I have the ability to believe in him and to exercise faith so that he will bring it in. Loved ones, it is what happened in 885 B.C., six hundred years after that situation with Moses. Elijah found himself at Zarephath in the middle of a drought. Look at it in 1 Kings 17:10-16, "So he arose and went to Zarephath, and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow, was there gathering sticks; and he called to her and said, 'Bring me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.' And as she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, 'Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.' And she said, 'As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a cruse; and now, I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.'" The drought had found her as it found all the other people -- with no resources to meet it. "And Elijah said to her; 'Fear not; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel, 'The jar of meal shall not be spent, and the cruse of oil shall not fail, until the day that the Lord sends rain upon the earth.' And she went and did as Elijah said; and she, and he, and her household ate for many days. The jar of meal was not spent, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord which he spoke by Elijah."

You have experience of that; all of us think it is looking into that little bowl and expecting to see the oil go down when you take a cup out, and the oil stays there. We all like to think it is

that way, but actually most of us here have experienced this; we have come into situations where we were in such dire straits that all we could do is depend on God. We couldn't look ahead ten years, two years, or even a week, all we could do was depend on God and see ourselves through today. And to this very day there are many of us in this room who cannot explain how the money lasted; if you asked us to go back and explain the bank account and how the checks went, we could not explain it. It baffles us. We came through that hard time; be it financial, domestic or physical, and we cannot explain how the energy or the strength or the resources lasted. Of course what was really happening was that we were, at that moment, eating of the tree of life. But an old unbelief gets into our hearts and we think there is some explanation: "Yes, it was just lucky; they didn't ask for rent at the right time." But we actually can't even explain, cynically, what we believe happened. The truth is that we were actually experiencing what Elijah was experiencing: we were receiving from the tree of God's spiritual creative life that energy that is able to regroup the molecules in this world and that is able to change the situation, simply because we were at the point of desperation. We at last no longer depended on our own knowledge or ability because that was washed out. We at last were depending wholly on God; therefore our faith enabled him to give us that life.

Now loved ones, that's what the Israelites experienced -- among all the people of the world they experienced that tree of life first. They first saw Moses split the Red Sea by faith in this life. They first saw this life level the walls of Jericho. They first saw this life produce water for them to drink out of a rock in the wilderness. They first saw this life lay down manna bread every morning for all the half million to million people that wandered for forty years in the wilderness. They first saw this life destroy hostile armies by plagues that were unknown to man. They first say that: God first showed that creative tree of life to them. They were, in a sense, the first natural branches of that tree. Yet the incredible thing was, when the Christ, the source of this creative life who had walked with them in the wilderness as a cloud during the day and a fire by night, this Christ who had become a rock to them in the wilderness when they needed it, when he revealed himself as he really is in his own human form --well, you see what they did in John 8. The whole chapter is concerned with it, but just look at verse 56: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad." Jesus was saying, "I was the one that was with your forefathers in the wilderness." Verse 57: "The Jews then said to him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.' So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple."

Loved ones that is why Paul says what he does in today's verse. Would you look at Romans 11:21: "For if God did not spare the natural branches" and that is who the Israelites were; they were the natural branches of that tree of life. They first experienced that life transforming this present space-time world. "if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you." Actually it is incredible that he hasn't spared the natural branches. It is amazing that this dear people rejected the source of that life after experiencing the power and action and the transforming energy of this creative life. When they rejected the source of that life what did they fall into -- preoccupation with the tree of knowledge. Do you remember "Fiddler on the Roof"? In it Tevye says that if he were a rich man, what he wanted to do was to sit in the temple and discuss the Holy Books! The loved ones who first experienced this creative life, ever since they rejected him when he came in the first century, have sunk more and more into the tree of knowledge, so that they are utterly preoccupied with their law; utterly preoccupied with commentaries on the law and commentaries on commentaries on the law.

Paul is saying to us, "Don't pride yourself: if God dealt that way with the natural branches when they rejected the tree of life, neither will he spare you." Loved ones that is the same thing that

will happen to us: if we fall back into trying to tackle life by our own analysis of it, our own understanding, our own knowledge, our own ability to manipulate this thing against this thing instead of reaching out by faith for this uncreated life of God and trusting him to come in and change things; we ourselves will sink into being cerebral Christians. We will sink into being a group of people who are eternally discussing theories, reading more books, arguing and analyzing, but never experiencing the changed life situations.

I would ask you: how do you live your life? Do you live a pretty carefully calculated, controlled, protected life where you know exactly what is going to happen from day to day and you don't let anything happen that you don't want to happen, and week follows week pretty boringly and pretty premeditated? Do you live life very much within the perimeter of your own knowledge and your own understanding and your own ability to control? When you go to bed at night, do you find yourself thinking, "Now what is happening at work? What does this person think of me? Yes, they are thinking this, so I'll have to take that action and cut them off there. This other thing is happening here, so I'll have to manipulate that." Do you see that that is a lie? You may say it is natural because so many of us do it, but that is a lie that depends on our knowledge and ability to control things and our ability to out think or out maneuver the other person. Or do you go to bed at night preoccupied with your dear Father; preoccupied with your dear God and with his Son Jesus? Loving them, enjoying them, confident that tomorrow they will inject new light into each situation that you meet?

Which way: do you expect something new to happen to you each day? Do you exercise faith for your friends at work? Do you expect some new development in your dad or mom, your wife or husband? In the problem situations that you are meeting in your life are you exercising faith that Jesus' life will come down and change that situation? Or do you feel "Oh, forget it, those were the old days in the Old Testament -- now I've just got to manipulate this thing however best I can."

Which way do you live? I tell you, if you keep nibbling at that tree of knowledge of good and evil, and you depend on that to live this life successfully, your life will shrivel up. You yourself will wither and grow smaller and smaller until you find yourself in a little narrow dark cell that is very like a casket. If you eat at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and depend on that, you will continually retreat in your life until you become a shadow of what God created you to be. But if you begin to live excitingly, exercising faith that God will actually change the situations in your life, change the people and change you yourself, you will find yourself growing bigger and more developed and blossoming until you are far better than you started out at the beginning of this life. The difference is one exercises faith for God to act and change things, and the other not believing for a moment that God can do that, and depending only on his or her own ability to analyze and manipulate.

Loved ones, if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare people like you and me. I would encourage you to start today: can you think of some situation that isn't ideal -- financially or professionally -- that isn't the way it should be? Can you think of some relationship that isn't the way it should be? Can you think of something in yourself that isn't the way it should be? Now stop trying to manipulate that. Stop trying to analyze it and think it through: ask God this moment to infuse his uncreated life into that situation and to change it. Exercise faith in that and continue to exercise faith throughout this week. I ask you to do that this week -- after all; it won't hurt you to try it! Exercise faith for it. Remember the person who prayed for rain and then went out without the umbrella and was soaked? Ok-- exercise faith for it and expect to see it happen -- make provision for it happening. Just as we tend to make provision for the flesh, now make

provision for this third dimension in your life actually taking place.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we see the situation of Moses at the Red Sea and we see how stupid it would have been to depend on the purely human, mental weapons that we use. We see, Lord, that nothing would have happened to those Israelites – they never would have gotten past square one if they had been fighting with just the weapons that we use. So Lord, we do see that in our own lives we haven't seen so much success or victory, as we've seen a dignified retreat that we've tried to cover up.

Lord we see that we weren't put here on earth to retreat; we weren't put here on earth to grow smaller. We were put here on earth to take ground for you and to bring order into this world and to bring harmony and to blossom and flourish. So Lord, we would take a stand in faith on this issue that we're now concerned about. Lord, we would commit this into your hands and we would trust in you and we know you will act. So Lord, we commit this to you now; and we exercise faith, Lord God, that you – who obviously destroyed the walls of Jericho by the invisible power of your Spirit; you, who obviously caused Jesus to be born in Mary's womb by the invisible power of your Spirit; you, who made bread in the wilderness for those hundreds of thousands of Israelites for over forty years by the invisible power of your Spirit; we ask you now to infuse a transforming energy into this situation and we ask you to change it. We ask you to change the person's attitude; to change their heart; change the situation itself and the circumstances.

Lord, we want to move forward toward Red Seas; we want to move forward to walls of Jericho. We want to move forward to things we cannot tackle by our own power. And Lord, we're ashamed how boring our life has become as we've sunk back into the limitations of what we're able to face by our own unaided knowledge. Lord we want to end that; we want to launch out and we want to go forward and meet Jericho's that we'll only be able to face through our faith in your power to change that situation.

So Lord we give ourselves to you now, to launch out into some kind of an exciting life: some kind of broadening, expanding life so that you are able to make us bigger than life-size. We thank you Lord that that is your will for us through him who is the tree of life: Jesus – in whose dear heart we have been placed by you. Thank you Lord.

Now the grace of our Lord, Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. Amen.