

Renewing The Mind #1

Romans 12:2d

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

During these past few weeks we have been talking about the way you and I are conformists in our own lives. Many of us, especially in our American society, end up conforming to what forces outside us pressure us to be, rather than being what we really are ourselves. I think you have found the same thing as I have, that you often conform to the ways of a certain social group. Indeed, often you find yourself conforming to certain jokes, telling certain jokes that you know everybody will accept, laugh at and approve. Many of us find ourselves following certain sports, not really because we want to, but because there is pressure to conform in that way. Many of us have found that in our religious lives, in our social lives, in our professional lives, we often conform to what pressures outside us make us do, rather than what we want to do ourselves.

Of course, the tragedy of it is that many of us have sensed that inside us there is an original, individual, real person who is dying by inches. Many of us who have moved towards middle age find that one of the chronic dissatisfactions and constant frustrations is the feeling that we have that the little voice of our own individual self sounds a bit fainter now than it sounded years ago when we were in our teens. We have a funny feeling that it is beginning to die completely. Many of us find ourselves in that spot. We find that we are doing what other people want us to do, what other people think we should do, what our peers expect us to do, and bit by bit we are losing touch with this person that we really are deep down inside.

I think that is why Robert Frost's poem hits us where we live, because he describes those two ways that he could go. He says, "Both that morning equally lay in leaves no step had trodden black, Oh, I kept the first for another day but knowing how way leads on to way I doubted if I should ever come back. I shall be telling this with a sigh, somewhere ages and ages hence, two roads diverged in a wood and I took the one less traveled by and that has made all the difference." Many of us think, "That is what I would like to do. I would like to live my own life as I really am." But how many of us here in this auditorium can relate to that line of his --"Oh, I kept the first for another day but knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back?"

How many of us are conforming to what the world wants us to be, not the bad old world, unfortunately, just the good old world, what it wants us to be. So way leads on to way until--why do we doubt we ever come back? Because we can't hear the person that used to speak so clearly to us as well as we used to. Why? Why do we conform? Because we are no fools. We know where we little squirrels will get our nuts from. That is really it. A little dog soon gets to know that the mom in the house gives him his food, so he will do anything the mom wants, especially around food time. He will conform exactly to her wishes so that he gets fed.

We all know we need love, which we define as material protection and provision, psychological recognition and approval and emotional happiness. We know that we can get those things from jobs, from society and from certain relationships. So we bow down to these gods as the supplier of the love that we need, and we conform to all that they want us to do. Bit by bit we can have our nuts and we may have them stored away for retirement, but we find in the process that we have lost something far more precious. Jesus talked about it when he said, "What does it matter if you gain

the whole world and lose your own self?" Many of us have found ourselves in that spot.

Now loved ones, that is why Paul wrote this verse at the beginning of Romans. Romans 1:21: "For although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened." Our minds have become darkened; that is the problem. We are like the little guy who lived in the middle of New York City and was asked by his teacher, "Where do you get milk?" and he said, "From a bottle." She said, "No, you get it from a cow." He said, "I get it from a bottle." Our dear old minds have become darkened so we think we will get all that we need of love from these things around us. Our minds become darker and darker and more enslaved to those things and direct our lives to conform to what these things want us to do. That is why Paul says, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind." (Romans 12:2)

I just want to take one area where I think we need to renew our minds. One area which forces a great deal of conformity in our lives because most of us spend eight hours in it every weekday is our work. Why do we work? We work to get money. Why do we want money? We need money for clothes and food so that we can survive. I think many of us will re-enforce that belief with Genesis 3:19: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread." Many of us say, "That is why we work. There it is in the Bible, "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.' We work to get bread and to get money. We work to get what we need." Then many of us will refer to Paul's comment in Thessalonians--"If anyone will not work let him not eat," and we say, "There it is again; obviously we work in order to eat."

Could I point out to you that neither of those verses actually say that? The verse in Genesis simply says that in the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread. It says you will eat bread and you will work; it doesn't say actually you will work in order to eat bread. In the Thessalonians verse, Paul is trying to deal with the survival mentality that had developed in those days among the people that wanted to go to the mountains and hide until Jesus came, and he said, "Listen, if a person does not work, there is something wrong in their lives, and therefore if they won't work, let them not eat." He was attacking the indolence and irresponsibility that was developing.

Actually that is not the scriptural doctrine of work--that you work in order to get money. If you want to see it, look at Genesis 1:28. "And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" Each one of us, however useless you may think you are, has been put on earth with certain abilities which when our lives are ruled by God's Spirit, will help to bring part of this world under his will and purposes. That is why we work; that is why God gave us work. He gave us work so that we would subdue the world and bring it under his will. Each one of us have certain abilities that enable us to do that. That is basically why we work.

What then should be our attitude to our bosses if that is the real reason for working? You will find it in Colossians 3:23: "Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men." You don't work to please your bosses; you work because you are serving not men, but Jesus. Why? Because he is the one that pays you, if you look at it in verse 24: "Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ." It is not your boss that pays you; it is not even the company that pays you. God's Word says you receive your reward, the inheritance, from our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore you serve him. The primary purpose of your work is to bring the world under his will, so you are serving him and he in fact is the one who pays you. In other words, there is no place for slavish desire to please every blink of man's eye. Loved

ones, that is a conformity that God has delivered us from and that you yourself can be delivered from, if you will see that you work heartily as serving the Lord, not as serving man.

Now what should be your attitude to those in authority? It is the same really. It is outlined in Ephesians 6:5-7. It is amazing, but Paul is actually saying this not to American workers who live in the land of the free and who have a sense that they have a right to individual freedom, but he is saying this to poor slaves. Yet isn't it the tragedy that many of us live worse than slaves in regard to our work? "Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; not in the way of eye service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Does your mind need to be renewed about your attitude to your work and the people that you work for? God makes it very clear that the purpose of your job is not to get money; it is to bring his world under submission to his will. He makes it very clear that you are working for him and you are not working for the boss. What attitude then should you have about work? If you are freed from this urgent desire to please the boss to avoid being fired, because you are now under God's appointment and not man's, what should be your attitude to your work day by day? It is stated plainly in Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. "Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun a few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot. Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil--this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart."

That is it--to enjoy the work, not to labor under it thinking, "Is this the only value I am to society?" It is no measure of your value at all. It is because your dear God has been pleased to allow you to bring part of his world under his will through that job that you are in at the moment, and he says to you "Enjoy it!" Don't lie under it thinking, "How can I get into the job that I should really be in?" God says, "Obey me first." Enjoy your work with all your heart, knowing that if God has something better for you he will lead you into it, if you obey his command to rejoice and enjoy your work day by day. That is it, loved ones.

Not with an eye to somebody watching you, seeing if you have done it better than the other and therefore maybe you will be promoted. That is what brings the ulcers; that is what brings the strain; that is what tires us, isn't it? It is not the work that tires us; it is what we are trying to get from the work--something that we were never meant to get from the work. We are never meant to get acknowledgement or recognition or a sense of importance from our work. We were meant to rejoice and enjoy our work and use it to bring some more order into God's world, whether anybody notices us or not.

Then where do you get your money? The only way you make money in this world is by doing the job better than anybody else so that eventually you can scramble to the top of the heap and make more money than the rest. Now if you give up that kind of urgent, vehement desire inside as you are working each day, where are you going to get your money? The same place you always got it. Look at Philippians 4:19: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." That is where you will get it. You know it is true because there isn't one of us except somebody very, very young who can't look back to a time when we had no job or the salary did

not cover our needs, and yet here we are today. Isn't that true? All of us have known that God has always supplied our needs. We may have argued with him about what our needs are, but if we accept his definition of needs, we have always made it, sometimes by the skin of our teeth, just and no more, but we have always made it. Actually our dear God is so good, because we have seen wisdom in him keeping us as lean as he has so that he has kept us from getting uppity by giving us too much. Our God always has supplies our needs.

Loved ones, it is not 3M corporation that supplies our needs. And actually in fairness to 3M or IBM, they never set out to supply your needs. They set out originally to bring more order into a certain part of the world. It is us that take 3M or IBM or your company and elevate them from the ordinary place where they are on earth. We elevate them and worship them as gods who supply our needs. Then we conform to the gods.

Loved ones, it just isn't true; it is a lie. It is part of the whole world system that is governed by the world rulers of this present darkness to darken your minds and to persuade you that your money and your needs are met by these things; they aren't! Your money and your needs are met by your God who will supply every need of yours from his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. That is exactly what Jesus said. "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow or reap or gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Not one sparrow falls to the ground but your heavenly Father knows it. Are you not of much more value than many sparrows? [Matthew 6:26] "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they don't toil nor spin; yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." [Matthew 6:28] Don't you know you are? Don't you know you are precious to him? Don't you know that he loves you, that he made you in the image of his own dear Son? You are the very crown of his creation. Of course he will continue to supply your needs. He asks you meanwhile to enjoy your work and to stop treating it as him or as a god in his place, and to rest back and relax.

How do you find what job is best? Study your abilities? Some people say that, but if you study your abilities and interests, your old carnal self has a way of blinding you so that you can't actually see your right abilities and interests. No, the first thing is to settle your mind on the basic fact that you are on this earth to bring part of God's world into order. Settle your mind that you are not here to try to wring out of a degree as much money as will see you through life. Turn your back on the idea that you are here to get the best and securest job you can to enable you to live to the end. Turn your back on those things and settle your mind on this basic fact of reality, that the reason the Creator put you here on this earth is to bring part of his world into order under his will. Then ask him to guide your eye to the part of the world, here in America or somewhere else, where he wants you to exercise that power for him. If you do that, he will automatically draw out the real abilities that he has planted in you which only he knows. That is it, loved ones.

If you say to me, "All this just comes by renewing the mind?" No, your dear little heart has a built-in fear, I know it has. You have trained it for years to fear men, to please men. Your dear little heart has had a slavish anxiety about what you will do if you lose your job. No change of mind can change that. That poor old knotted up personality can't be changed by just renewing your mind. But loved ones, you know the answer--God already changed that for you in Jesus. God remade that tortured, little anxiety ridden personality of yours. He put it into his Son, destroyed it there and resurrected it, and the only one of you that is really alive now is that pure, clean personality.

That is why you renew your mind. You renew your mind so that it gels with reality. It is the reality

of what God has done to you in Jesus that will free your old personality from those sleepless nights and from that dreadful anxiety to please. Your mind doesn't do it; your mind just recognizes reality. God says as soon as your mind believes what is real and right, that moment reality will break in upon your life and the Holy Spirit of God will free you inside in regard to your work and your job, and you will no longer be conformed to this world but you will be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Because I knew the anxiety myself in work, I pray for any little one who is under it. Loved ones, stand up and be free. Renew your mind, see things as they really are instead of as the lies Satan has presented them to you.

One last little story occurs to me. Belfast was a shipyard city originally, because of the trees and forests that grew on the sides of Belfast loch. The great employer in the city was Harland and Wolff. My dad was an electrician at Harland and Wolff. Everybody breathed, ate, slept because of that great shipyard company. I remember through the Second World War, Dad going down to disentangle all the wires that had been blown apart by the bombs. Everything was submitted to that great company. It went bankrupt last year; it doesn't exist anymore. So with 3M, so with IBM, so with Fish Enterprises, so with all our silly little companies that we depend on. Loved ones, they are flowers of the field; they sprout up and then they perish in the next wind. There is only One who will supply your needs when they are all gone, the One who has always supplied them throughout your life, the One who never changes. Let's acknowledge him in our lives and respect him and give him thanks.

Let us pray.

Father, we do see how foolish and stupid we are to see us scramble to please men or significant others who we thought had power over our destiny. We apologize for that stupidity and rebellion against you. We apologize to you when we have worshipped these things as gods. There is only one God, only one faithful Father. He has promised to supply every need of ours from his riches in glory.

So, Lord, we bow to you this morning and thank you that in Jesus you have renewed our selfish, slavish, little personalities. Lord, we believe we are free from these powers and pressures. So we intend to live with our minds renewed in accordance with reality. We intend to live doing our work with all our hearts, enjoying it, rejoicing in it and content that you will move us when it is time. We intend to respect those who are in authority over us not because they have any power over us or because they pay us but simply because you told us to respect them. You want us to respect them in freedom and liberty.

Lord, we trust you that you will bring forth the abilities and interests we have as day by day we do our work heartily as on to you. We trust that whether we have work or not, you will supply our needs from your riches in glory in Christ Jesus. Lord, we thank you for that. We give ourselves to you and intend to be different on Monday morning and to behave differently in the office because of the freedom of being sons and daughters of a millionaire, doing our work to please him. We thank you, Lord.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of His dear Holy Spirit be with us throughout this week.