

God's Will -- Personal Revival

Romans 12:2h

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Please turn to Romans 12:2. We are coming to the end of this verse that we have spent several weeks studying. These are the last two clauses: "That you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." I would just point out to you that when it says, "that you may prove" it means "test out by experience" -- that you may test out by experience what is the will of God, what is good. Then "acceptable" is the Greek word "euarestos" which is "pleasing", which is really a little advance on good, -- "what is good, what is pleasing" -- and then a big advance, "what is perfect."

Now everybody would agree, "Yes, that is a good thing to do, to live according to the will of the Creator. It is the sensible thing to do. If there is a Maker in this universe, I would rather be doing what he wants me to do than not. That's the way to live. It is important to live according to the will of the Person who has absolute control over us, both before we came alive and after we die." For many of us the beginning of doing that has been beginning to live the way we are told to in the beginning of verse 2. "Do not be conformed to this world."

For many of us that has been the first step in beginning to try to live according to the will of our Maker and to stop living according to public opinion. We knew that we should do that when we saw what living according to public opinion had brought us to. In other words, many of us saw the mess our lives had got into by trying to live by what all men and women thought we should do in our lives.

For most of us, that is why we turned to God. Our lives were beginning to fray at the edges. Many of us first began to question whether we should continue to live to please everybody else when we saw our lives beginning to fray at the edges, begin to fall apart, to deteriorate. We saw ourselves floating self-indulgently on the sea of life and we began to realize, "It is coming apart." All of us had different reasons. Some of us had habits that we saw were destroying us. Some of us were habituated to drugs, to alcohol, to fornication; some of us to selfish drive and ambition.

We began to realize that our selfishness was alienating all the people around us. Or, we began to see that our self-gratification was just disgusting ourselves. Or we began to see that the life that we were living was becoming not worth living, and we felt we had to do something about it, and so many of us turned to God. It was out of sheer selfishness and fear that we turned to God.

Now at this point, all of us divide into two groups. Most of us would say we travel together up until that point. Then at that point when we turn to God in desperation, we divide into two groups. One group gets Band-aid [bandage] treatment and the other group begins to discover what the cause of the problem is. One group meets a kind of counterfeit for God, a kind of idol -- and the other group actually meets God himself. Some of us fell into the counterfeit rescue operation that society runs for those who begin to feel that life is coming apart. It is mentioned in Jeremiah, because it has been here as long as the world has. Some of us had come to the place where we couldn't take any more of it; we knew it was either suicide or do something about life. In Jeremiah 8:11 God says through Jeremiah about the false prophets, "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." That is what some of us have experienced. Now listen patiently and

don't get up and leave when I tell you how that came to you.

You went to somebody saying, "My life is falling apart, and I'm coming apart at the edges. This habit has got the upper hand of me, and I don't know what to do." And they said, "Turn your life over to God and come and get involved in Bible study groups and in the fellowship of the church." We, encouraged by that, began to experience the kind of deliverance that is mentioned in that tenet of Alcoholics Anonymous that runs: Turn to some power greater than yourself -- even if it is simply a community that is stronger or more powerful than yourself or if it is a group of friends. Many of us experienced that kind of deliverance; we were helped. Our life did begin to come together again, and we did begin to get our act together. That is what we call salvation, but we weren't born of God.

We don't actually treat Jesus as our only beloved Savior, but we do come to church, we fellowship, we attend Bible study groups and we have kind of turned our life over to God. We primarily mean, "Lord, take over. I don't know what to do with it all." It is primarily a kind of "get rid of the stuff into somebody's hands," but we call that turning our lives over to God.

Now the other group of us, when we came to that point in our lives, were fortunate enough to meet some people who said, "Look, the outward dislocation in your life -- your alcohol problem -- is only a symptom. The real reason for that dislocation in your life is that you yourself have been ignoring your Creator for years. You have been living your own life. You have rebelled against your Creator, rejected his will for your life. That is why you are in this mess. You have sinned against your Maker. What you have actually done is make yourself into a monster. You are not what he meant you to be at all. You have kicked him in the face and thrown your life back into his face and said, 'Look, I'm going to be my own god, I'm going to do my thing!' That's the problem." These people began to share with us that the basic problem was not alcohol or drugs or sex or unhappiness or lack of money. The big problem was that we had rebelled against our own God. We had sinned against our God and created a personality that was fit only to be destroyed in hell.

Then when we heard that, we began to sense a deep conviction of sin coming over us and we began to see that was exactly what we had done. We had certainly, in a loose sense, sinned against our wives, our children, our colleagues, our friends and parents, but there was really only one Person we had sinned against, as the Psalmist said, "Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned and done this wrong." We saw that we had sinned against our God. We saw that every act and thought and word that was evil that we had produced over our lifetime was destined (as all acts and thoughts and words are if you understand something of Einstein's emphasis on eternity and infinity) to continue to exist throughout the universe forever. Except that God's Son Jesus had taken those things that we had done and said and thought into his own heart, and he had ended that nightmare possibility that we would have to look at those things for the rest of eternity, by allowing them to be destroyed in himself on Calvary.

For the first time we realized that this man Jesus had borne these sins that we had committed and that there was hope that God would forgive us, because his Son had taken these things into himself as his own. We had often thought, "I'd hate anybody to have to clean up my mess if I was sick. I would hate for anybody to clean up the dirtiest parts of my life" -- and suddenly we realized that this Person had done that. He had taken the worst that we had produced, and so that we could be freed from having that forever alongside us and forever burning us into hell, he took it into himself and bore it on Calvary. We felt, "We will do anything, Lord, to be right with our Maker." When we realized that at age 33 this man Jesus had given his life up for us and gone to hell for us,

a deep desperate gratitude came out of our hearts. "He gave his life for my life." We said, "Lord Jesus, thank you for doing this, for dying. Thank you for making it possible for me to be right with my Maker. Lord, here is my life, I give it to you. Do whatever you want with it."

You remember what happened. God enabled the Spirit of Jesus to come close to us. We embraced Jesus as our last hope, in desperation, and his Spirit came into us and we began to feel like he feels about God. We began to feel that God was our Father. A spirit of sonship came inside us that made us want to call Him our dear Dad, our dear Father. Instead of a God we were scared of, suddenly we began to sense he was our Father, and something happened inside us and we were born into his family. We began to feel the same way about him as Jesus did: a warm, intimate love for God, a desire to be with him, a desire to talk to him each day. Talking with him became the thing we looked forward to. Finding out what he wanted us to do, what his will was as we searched his word, became the delight of our hearts.

Then as we began to sense what he was doing for us, we knew that all the world had this done for them, and that they were living in a fool's paradise, they were living a lie when they could live in heaven. So we began to witness to others. We began to tell them about Jesus and tell about what had happened to us. That took over all the problems of our lives. All the problems of our lives faded into the background and we became utterly preoccupied with this new center of our lives; preoccupied with what our Father wanted us to do in this life, not what we wanted to do; preoccupied with what he was thinking, not what we were thinking. So our whole lives were changed.

Now that is the New Birth. I'd ask first of all, have you entered into that? Have you experienced the real salvation, or has it been kind of the deliverance of the group? Then the second thing I would ask you: Is it real in you today? You see up to a point it is good, because it gets you preoccupied with what is good. It gets you anxious to prove or to test by experience what is the will of God, what is good. How would you feel if I quoted an old hymn to you? "Where is the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord? Where is that soul-refreshing view of Jesus and his Word?"

Would your heart echo a little to that? Would you say, "Well, the New Birth was real but it has become a bit old in my life now"? Has your relationship with God entered into a kind of middle-age period? Have you begun to find that you gave up the legalism of daily prayer some time ago, and you just pray now when you feel moved to pray? Would you say that the Bible study each day is kind of a duty? Would you say that the witnessing doesn't seem to be the big preoccupation of your life now, and there are other things that are important in your life that you have to get on with? Would you say that you are beginning to back off on just being preoccupied with trying to prove what is good, and you have sidled down to a little bit of "what is the least good I can do to get into heaven? What is the least I can do to maintain this relationship that I entered into in the early days?"

Loved ones, are you living in the liberty and the freedom and the joy and the spontaneity and the delight that you entered into when you were first born of God? Or, are you touched by words that God in his goodness had the Holy Spirit speak to the churches in Revelation? Revelation 2:4: "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." Or Revelation 3:15: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."

Have you found that what used to be a personal devotion to your Savior and a personal love to a dear

Friend has deteriorated into a kind of preoccupation with morality and immorality, with what is right and what is wrong? Has that personal touch with Jesus, that personal sense of obligation and gratitude to a dear man who gave his life for you has faded now, and you are moving on to the more general problems of Christianity and Christendom? You are finding that not only is it more difficult to keep the outside life right, but it is more difficult to keep from criticizing others who fail to do it. You find you are often projecting the hypocrisy in your own heart into others and condemning it. That is the mark of a carnal, defeated Christian life.

It is an outward conformity to the Ten Commandments, even though it is a struggle to maintain that, and an inward conformity to the works of the flesh. I wonder, do you find yourself there at all? Do you find yourself with an outward life that is kind of Christian -- it avoids the worst of the Ten Commandments -- but with an inward life that conforms to the list of works of the flesh that are given in Galatians? It would be good to look at them and allow God's Word to speak to us directly. Galatians 5:19: "Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife," (of course we loved everybody when Jesus first came into our hearts, we just loved everybody) "jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like." Is it difficult for you to read these next words and not doubt your salvation? That is the mark of a carnal Christian -- if you have difficulty reading these next words without doubting your salvation. "I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Do you know what has happened? Turn to the parable in Luke 8:14: "And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature." If you feel that the glow and the shine has gone off the New Birth, it is because you have taken your life back into your own hands. You have decided, "Well, I better go on with my life now. I had better get involved in the things that everybody else is involved in."

Loved ones, when God called you to himself in Jesus, he didn't just call you to prove what is the will of God, what is good. He didn't! That is your mistake. You think that was the best God had for you: to live a good life, an outwardly good life. The next phrase in the verse we are studying says, "what is acceptable" or "what is pleasing". The reason Jesus died on Calvary was not simply to produce your life as a good outward life, but to produce a heart that wanted to please the Father, that wanted to please personally a dear Father that had forgiven it and had saved it and delivered it. Our life is meant to be lived fully and only for that purpose.

You know how easy it is for a little son to obey his father when he has a real friendship relationship with his dad. It is delightful. He loves to see the look in his father's eyes when he does something right. It is easy. Pleasing the father is a completely different thing to him from obeying the things that his father has told him he must do. The purpose of Jesus' death was not just to take away your fear of punishment, to take away the guilt of your sins or to enable you to know that you were forgiven by God. Do you know what forgiveness is?

Forgiveness is the restoration of a relationship. Forgiveness is God putting you in his Son, lifting you up onto his knee again, and that is where you are sitting -- sitting on the Father's knee. There as you talk with him about what he intends you to do in your life, you find coming out of your heart, Jesus' heart, wanting to please God. Not just, "How little can I get away with without going to hell?" but "Father, what would you like me to do? I have things in it that don't seem to be your heart. I feel anger and jealousy and envy. Father, I need these taken out of my heart because they

aren't pleasing to you." That is why God allowed Jesus to die on Calvary. Not only to take away the sins, loved ones, but to take away the self, the miserable self that produces those sins. Not only to cleanse the outside life, but to cleanse the heart inside so that again you feel the love and the delight and the joy in Jesus that you felt when you were first born of God.

In other words, you need revival in your own life. The Bible talks about that in a specific way, slightly different from the way it talks about revival in a church or in a community. The Bible talks about that as being filled with the Holy Spirit. That is what you need. You need to get your life out of your own hands and back into the hands of the dear One who first saved and delivered you. That is the first step. If you say, "What you say is right. What do I do?" Here it is in Revelation 2:5: "Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first." That is plain for everybody here. Start again.

Go back to where you left Jesus aside. Repent -- admit to him that you are wrong, that your life is now centered on self, that you are now preoccupied with getting rich or getting famous or getting successful or being happy, and you have forgotten the works that you did before. You have turned aside from making your chief aim in life to tell others about him. You have turned aside from looking forward to starting the day in prayer. You have stopped doing those things. Now stop that laziness and self-indulgence and do the works again that you did before. You start getting up in the morning to pray, you start reading the Bible, you start coming to the meetings in this body that are not attractive to carnal people.

Do you know what those are? Those are prayer meetings. We love activity, but only those who have a heart to please the Father are willing to wait upon him enough to get his heart for their lives. That is where all constructive Christian movements begin -- in a body of people who wait upon their Father, anxious to know what he wants to do in their lives. That is why so many of us are absolutely without guidance.

That is why so many of us are drifting, drifting from one job to another, because we never, never get before God long enough for the thoughts in our eternally turning minds to stop turning so that at last God can speak through the sound of gentle stillness, His own voice. Loved ones, begin to come to prayer meetings. You don't need to pray aloud; you just have to be there. Start doing again the things that you did before. The Bible says, repent and do the works that you did before. Start again.

Then get back to Calvary. "At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the Lord" -- that is the key. That is where God will deliver you from self. That is where you will find deliverance from this inward sin that is destroying your life. Get back to Calvary. After the works of the flesh are listed in Galatians, Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit, and then he says, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." It is in Calvary that you will find the glorious truth that you were crucified with Christ and you have to simply throw that whole thing over and stop trying to run your life for God. That is the mistake we make. We did it partly out of good hearts and partly out of a little desire to keep control. We decided we would run our lives for God.

Loved ones, no one can run their life for God. You end up running it for yourself. What Calvary means for those of us who believe in Jesus is the end of ourselves, the end of our right to our lives, the end of our right to say, "I'm going to sleep late this morning", the end of our right to say, "No, I won't talk to that person about Jesus because I'll get embarrassed", the end of our

right to be embarrassed, the end of the right to have our own way in our own life. That is what Calvary is about.

Give your life over to Jesus and determine, "Lord, I will do whatever. Holy Spirit, I ask you to come in -- not as a guest, not as a consultant, or as I have made you here, almost a servant, when I've asked you what I should do and then I have just rejected that and done what I thought. Holy Spirit, I give up my right to do anything but what you tell me. I die to my right to negotiate or discuss with you. I am going to obey you instantly when you tell me to do something."

Loved ones, if you will get back to those things, the blessed Holy Spirit will come in and fill you again with himself and cleanse out the leaven that you left at the bottom of your heart, never touched. That was the problem. At the New Birth you did not get everything dealt with. It is like a milk bottle with some sour cream in the bottom, and it doesn't matter how much more milk you put in, the stuff in the bottom keeps souring, whenever God's Spirit comes in. You have to get out that stuff at the bottom; that unclean heart of yours has to be destroyed on Calvary.

If you do that, you will come back into life that is free and a life that is sold out to God. If you don't do it, you will dribble away your miserable, middle-aged, suburban life into hell. You will! You will have your cars and garages and the things you want, but you will destroy your life, you will lose everything. Our Savior calls us to all or nothing. I remember a dear guy called Robert Newton Flew [1886–1962], a professor at Oxford who was lecturing us in Christian Ethics who said, "Christianity is all or nothing", and that is it. If you have any sense of a carnal life in your own heart, it is because you are beginning to get nothing and to give nothing.

So, I would encourage your heart if you are in that state. Repent and do the works that you did before -- works worthy of repentance. Start praying in the morning, start reading the Bible, start witnessing again. "Lord, you want me to say something? I'll say it. I don't know what I'm going to say after that, but I'll say what you want me to say at this point." Begin to come to the things in Jesus' body that produce and project the glory of God. That is the prayer meetings -- the places where we wait upon God and where we seek his face. I was in that spot, and that is why I can describe it so well. There is a way through it to victory. It is the way God has told us this morning. I pray that you will take it.

Let us pray.

Father, we see that there will be no lukewarm people in your presence at the end of this life. There will be no souls that are neither cold or hot. Father, we see that you will spew them out of your mouth. Lord, we know you say that to us not in anger but to make us sit up and take notice to the deception we have fallen into. The deception that we can take what we want of salvation and mix it with one's own desires. Lord, we see there is no way in which that can happen. One or the other has to take over completely.

Lord, we see the whole vision of a heart that wants to please the Father. We notice in our own hearts a legalism, more of a feeling how little we can do to get into heaven rather than what else can we do to get into heaven. Lord, we feel that the personal relationship with you has slipped into the background. We have instead become preoccupied with principles and ways to save the world.

Lord Jesus, we see we can never go any higher than you and we can never go any deeper than you. You are our dear Savior. You took the worst in each one of us here in this room and allowed it to be

burned out and destroyed forever. You have done this all so that we would be able to walk straight and fly right. We thank you, Lord, that's why you did it. Now you look at us and see if we are going to step into what you want from us. O Saviour, how could we refuse without crucifying you again? Lord Jesus, we owe you everything. We owe you our lives. We give them back into your hands and we trust you as you see fit to come into us and live your life in us again. We won't put any weights upon you. We won't try to control you or imprison you. We give you free rein in our lives, Lord, from this day forward.

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