

Who is Ruling Your Life?

Romans 12:11c

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Sometimes when we're studying a verse, God seems to impress upon me that we need to go at it again. Sometimes we go at it for four or five weeks before we get it and I feel that about this verse Romans 12:11 that describes the kind of people God created us to be and therefore of course, the kind of people we would be happiest being. Because that's the real truth of that; not that God created us to be this so now we have to slave to be it but actually we'll be happiest if we are that.

Romans 12:11, "Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit". The word for "be aglow" in Greek is "zeontes". It means boiling or burning or seething and the two words for the spirit are "to pneumatic" so it means seething in the spirit. I suspect that when we hear "seething in the spirit", we immediately take the position of spectator rather than participant because we think that's the kind of thing that those missionaries and martyrs are who died for the cause, "they're seething in the spirit -- well I am not one of them." We have a picture of seething in the spirit that suggests to us the missionaries or the martyrs who were utterly dominated by one single-minded aim to convert people to Christianity.

Therefore, we tend to think, "Well if that's seething in the spirit, I am not like that and I don't know that I want to be like that." We tend to think of those people that Jesus described who will cover and traverse land and sea in order to make one convert and we think, "Now that's what seething in the spirit is." Except that when Jesus made that comment he was not approving of those people. Do you know that?

Jesus did talk about the people who would traverse sea and land to make one convert but he wasn't actually approving of them. It's in Matthew 23:15, and if you look at it, you'll see the context.

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves." So Jesus implies very clearly that there is a kind of seething in the spirit that is not right and that is not what his Father wants.

In other words there's seething and seething or there's boiling and boiling or there's zeal and again there's zeal or there's enthusiasm and again there's enthusiasm. In other words there's a right way to be seething in the spirit and there's a way that Jesus condemns as actually satanic.

Now what is the difference? You'll find the difference if you'll go back to the verse and look a little more closely at it. It's Romans 12:11 and the difference is even signified by our English translation. See the middle clause: "Never flag in zeal", and then "be aglow with the Spirit". Do you see the first letter of the word "Spirit" in the RSV? It's an "S" but it's a capital "S" and the Revised Standard Version translators used that to show that in the Greek the article "the" preceded the word for Spirit.

In Greek it's "pneumatic" -- a "spirit", and gives us our English word "pneumatic". The word before that is the word "toe" and it means "the"- "the spirit". To signify that, retranslated by a

capital "S" it signifies the Spirit of God. So that it means "be aglow with the Spirit of God".

If you ask what other spirit is there, if you look at Romans 8:16, just a few chapters back, you'll find there is another spirit; "It is the Spirit", that's capital 'S' you see, the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our", and then you see the small "s", "with our spirit". And whenever the RSV has a small "s", it means our spirit.

So we have human spirits, each one of us. Jeanie Dixon [an astrologer] is not simply in touch with psychic powers or forces, though others might be -- people like Jeanie Dixon aren't. They're in touch with other spirits, sometimes familiar spirits. Spiritualists are often in touch not with the Spirit of God but with elemental spirits of the universe who imitate the spirits of the dead.

You have a spirit. Even people who are not children of God have spirits. Some of them have spirits that are very alive and that's sometimes why we call a person very spiritual. We often don't mean they're particularly a Christian, they just seem very sensitive to the spirit world.

So we have spirits and when God says we are to be seething with the spirit, he means his Spirit. You can be seething with your own spirit and if you look at verse 15, there are other spirits besides our own spirit.

Romans 8:15, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of sonship." There are other spirits. There's a spirit of patriotism even that can take hold of people. God is not saying seethe with your own spirit or seethe with a spirit of fear or a spirit of patriotism but seethe with his Spirit and that's the difference between the two kinds of zeal.

In other words, God is not saying seethe with that restless spirit that filled the Pharisees with a kind of impersonal light in their eyes with which they went to people to try to convert them to their faith. He says don't seethe with that spirit. That fills your eyes with a kind of impersonal, de-humanized zeal that frightens the people that you talk to and convinces them that all you're interested in is converting them to what you believe is truth but that you don't really care about them, themselves. Have you ever met that? I have.

I've had church people and religious people talk to me, I should say talk AT me, because that's what I felt they were doing. They were looking at me and starring at me and actually that's what made me wonder first because they seemed to be starring in a very impersonal way at me, starring right through me it seemed. It didn't seem to me that they were interested in me at all or really loved me or cared about me; it seemed that they were just intent on trying to convert me to what they believed was true, and doesn't that make you feel uneasy?

They're seething all right, and they look as if they're driven and as if they're enthusiastic but they don't really look as if they love you or they care about you. It's the look that you get in the eyes of some salesmen who are obviously utterly preoccupied not with you or how they can benefit you, but with the commission that they're going to make out of the sale that they're going to make to you. You immediately feel, "this person isn't really interested in me myself" and that's not the kind of seething that God is talking about.

Where we're preoccupied with a cause or with our view of truth rather than preoccupied with the person themselves, that kind of seething is either done in our own spirit or it's seething in some

evil spirit but it's not seething with the Spirit of God. Many of us in the midst of the Jesus movement thoroughly put our relatives off by that kind of seething. Looking back, we didn't really know how to love them or concern ourselves with them. We were only concerned to get them to agree that we were right.

It's that kind of seething that causes such pain and bewilderment in families when the husband or the father is so determined to prove that he is worth something by doing something for God or for his church, or by the professional husband or father who is so determined to prove that he is able to achieve something in his career that that's the only thing he cares about. It brings a kind of indifference to human beings and indifference to his wife and indifference to his children.

It brings a kind of impersonal, dehumanized zeal that frightens you more than it impresses you with their love of you. Yet isn't it true that many of us, when we read that verse, "seething in the spirit", think that's what the missionaries did of old? That's what the old martyrs had; they burned for God's cause. It wasn't so much for people, it was just they were driven and that's what we want to be.

That's not what they were. We get that impression because of the tendency of posterity to lionize the past and the tendency of us to write our books exaggerating certain characteristics that we think are very admirable. The missionaries weren't like that. They were dear ordinary people who were very personable.

St. Francis is looked upon as the ideal of that burning eyed, zealous saint. But Francis himself was a dear personable young man who led a group of troubadours in his hometown. It was the local rock band! After he was converted, he carried on the same kind of very personable, friendly, ordinary, human kind of life. So much so that when he came to give a name to the ones who were following him, who were following Jesus, he didn't call them something grand like the Franciscans or the monks, he called them "Les jongleurs de Dieu", in French, the jugglers of God, God's jesters. He was so filled with the joy of God and the delight of God's world and the kindness of God to him that he was filled with fun and personableness and ordinary human love.

That's what God's desire for us is and God's will for us; seething with his Spirit not with our own spirits and that's the real question today that this phrase brings up. Are you seething with God's Spirit? Or another way to put it is, who runs your life? Who runs your life? We husbands have joked and said, "Who runs my life? You know who runs my life!"

But who does run your life? Husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, who runs your life? You know how many of us would answer, "Well, I can't run my life, and yet, when I think of it I often feel I don't run it. To tell you the truth, I often feel my life is run for me."

"I often feel my job runs it 8 hours a day so that takes care of 8 hours a day, 40 hours a week. The needs of my home, the maintenance of the home, my relationships with those who live in my home, if it's my family, them or my friends, if I live with them, occupy a lot of my life; they kind of run a lot of it. At the weekends, there are things that I have to do, things that I haven't got done during the week and there's a little recreation. I suppose if you ask me, my life really runs me. I don't feel I run my life." Many of us might say that even underneath those external duties, there are other kinds of vague subconscious forces that also provide the drive that runs our lives.

Many of us might say, "Often I am seething all right but I am seething with the spirit of anxiety or

worry and often my wife and my children, my friends and my roommates think I am hardly aware of them. They'll often say, "Do you know I am here at all or do you ever think of me, do you really love me, do you really care about me? And to tell you the truth it's because I am often seething with worry or anxiety or sometimes with fear. In my career I am seething with a desire to succeed or to be somebody."

That's not the way God meant us to live. That's why he sent us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is mentioned in the second verse of the Bible, it says there in the beginning, "God made the heavens and the earth and then the Spirit of God brooded upon the waters".

In other words, the Holy Spirit was there at the very beginning working on the mass of gas and vapor and material out of which the order of this world was created and it was the Holy Spirit who took those things and brought them into order. It's the Holy Spirit who keeps it in order and maintains it. How do you think the swallows know to fly south at winter? How do you think the salmon will struggle and leap as high as 8 or 10 feet to go up a stream at a certain time of the year?

What about all the other movements in our world that seem to be inexplicable? The Spirit of God is guiding all those mysterious actions that take place that continue to keep our world moving. It's the Spirit of God who turns us around to the sun every morning and turns us away from the sun at night so that we can get rest.

In other words, the Holy Spirit's particular task here in this world is to reveal to each thing that is created its place in the world and to enable it to fulfill its purpose. Now you are here with a different purpose to the purpose that I have. You are. I keep saying this to you because our mass society and even our educational system tends to treat us as a lump. We are not a lump. You're different from me and I am different from you and you have a dignity and a beauty that I will never have and I have a dignity and a beauty that you won't have. It's different.

Each one of you is different. Each one of you is here with a special purpose that your Creator had in mind when he made you and no impersonal force of a love of money or a need for security or a desire to be successful is sufficient to guide you. Every time you are guided by those impersonal, elemental forces -- whether they're to get other people to join your church or to join your organization or to believe in your cause or whether they're impersonal forces of anxiety or desire for success or for satisfaction -- they'll drive you into stereotype. Don't you see that's why so many of us are dissatisfied with our lives?

That's why you so often feel like a zilch, that's why so often you feel like a nothing. You feel, "I am just one of a number", because you're letting impersonal spirits and forces drive you and treat you as if you're just a food-eating, clothes-wearing animal. The Creator has sent you here to do something that none of the rest of us can do and he has sent you a personal counselor to lead you into that and that's what the Holy Spirit is.

Did you know that the Spirit of God is not a force? Do you realize that? The Spirit of God isn't a force that comes upon us. Look at John 16:7 where Jesus states why he died and why he ascended to be with His Father.

John 16:7, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." That's the way Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit. The "Spirit" -- capital "S" -- of truth, will guide you. And

he says, "I'll send the Counselor and the Counselor will not come to you unless I send him but if I go, I will send –“it” -to you"? No. "I will send HIM to you."

The good desires that you have already in your heart are because the Holy Spirit is inside you and wants certain things and you feel him wanting those. It's him that innervates and energizes your conscience and makes you feel you want to do certain things. The Holy Spirit is a person and he alone can lead you into the life that God has planned for you.

You see further down in John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." The Holy Spirit will guide you and will show you what you are to do in your life. He will guide you day-by-day and he will show you what you're to be.

Don't think "Oh you mean he'll guide me, I'll just be walking by and he'll say, 'Speak to your boss'; okay boss, I have to speak to you." It's not that. It's not so much the things that he'll tell you to do, though he will tell you to do things, but he'll guide you how to think and how to be and what he wants you to be. He'll form you and mold your character.

Too often we're just copies of other people. Too often we're being what other people want us to be but the Holy Spirit wants to paint a picture of Jesus in you that's unique and different. One saint said, "You are a picture frame inside which the Holy Spirit is going to paint a unique picture of Jesus." So your life is unique and the Holy Spirit wants to make you a certain expression of Jesus that only you can be and only the Holy Spirit can guide you into that.

In other words, the verse really means seething, boiling. But it can be misunderstood. It's really "bubbling with the Holy Spirit". You and I are meant to have a life that comes up from within us, from the Holy Spirit himself so that we're bubbling with the Spirit of God, not driven this way by this person and that way by another person, not pushed by this pressure and shoved by that need, not compelled by that desire, not led on by that character but bubbling from within, with a unique life that is developing and forming under the personal attention and guidance of God's Holy Spirit.

You are meant to be nothing less than that, and you're thinking wrongly if you think, "Well, there's Billy Graham and there's Martin Luther and there's some other big guys and some other important women and I am none of those, I am just a little soul living my own life as best I can." That's a heresy. That's a heresy and a rotten lie.

You're a dear, special person that your Creator has taken a lot of care of and for whom Jesus has died so that he might have a chance to live a unique life through you that he can't live through any of the rest of us. And he has put within you his Spirit and you know you've heard that voice before; you've heard the voice of the Holy Spirit.

If you'll start listening to him and begin making his acquaintance and begin talking to the Holy Spirit and begin doing what he guides you to do, his voice will grow stronger and stronger and you will become the unique individual that God made you to be and not just a poor copy of other copies.

It's important that you get out of the rat race and begin to listen to that dear Spirit of God

inside you so that your life begins to bubble with the Spirit of God, with a life that comes from within. I pray especially for the one who is sitting here thinking it's a good commercial. Don't. It's for you and the proof of it is who of us in this world is like you? Not a soul.

Who in the whole four billion of us in the world is like you? Not a soul.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we do know when we look into the mirror we might not think we're the handsomest or most beautiful people in the world, we may not think we're very wonderful but Lord, we do know we're different from everybody else and Lord that answers all our fears that we may just be a product of chance here, that we may just be like the millions of others, just a cog in the machine.

Lord, we see we are no cog, we are an original creation and then Lord we do see that you must have made us that way for a purpose because it must take so much effort and thought and care to make us all different. And Lord you must have some reason for it and we do see Lord that you've told us in your word that Jesus is to be the first born among all creation, the first born among many brethren and that that's why we're here; because you are able to express Yourself through us in a way and with a look and with a flavor and an accent and with a special appearance that no one else can reproduce.

Holy Spirit, we would ask you to begin to bubble within us and begin to send up from the bottom of our hearts, impressions of what God dreamed us of being. Holy Spirit, begin to enable us to be what our Maker had in mind when he made us. Help us Holy Spirit to be ourselves, to be individuals. We may not be as great as everybody else, we may not be as famous as everybody else but Holy Spirit, we want to start being what You want us to be, not what we ourselves want, but what you want.

So Holy Spirit we would begin to listen to you and to say the things you tell us to say and most of all to be what you guide us to be so that Jesus will be glorified in us and so that we will find that life that is abundant. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.