

Me and My Actions

Romans 14:03

Sermon transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Do you think abortion is wrong? And do you think it's wrong in every situation? For instance would it be wrong in the case of a mother who had a genetically inherited insanity and would therefore be bound to pass it on to her children? There was a family in a small town in Minnesota who, for several generations, had simply passed the insanity on from generation to generation.

Now, would it be wrong in the case of a 13-year-old girl who had been gang raped -- would abortion be wrong for her? Would it be wrong for another young woman who just got herself into trouble and the guy wouldn't marry her -- would abortion be wrong for her? Or would it be wrong for a mother whose life is threatened? What attitude would you have to anyone who was a Christian who got up and said, "Well yeah, I do believe in abortion and I actually believe abortion is right for a couple who have an unwanted pregnancy." Now, what would your attitude be to that person? Would you say, "That little fetus inside that mother's womb is a human being so if he says that, he believes in murder -- he believes in killing a human being?" What if he replies, "No, I don't believe that little fetus is a human being and therefore I don't think I believe its murder." Then maybe you'd say, "But it is. Many medical authorities say that it is even the shape of a little human being and certainly it has many of the capacities of an adult human being in embryonic form. So it is a human being." And what if he replies, "Well, no. I mean it has no rights before the law and it has no responsibilities before God until it's separated from it's mother's body, and so that's why," he says, "I am almost drawn to call it an "it" because to me it still is not a separate human being before God and the law." And then you reply, "No, it's a shame even to call it "it". It's "he" or "she" we can even tell the sex of the child in certain situations. No, that little human being inside there has rights of its own and if you kill it, or you stop its birth, then you are destroying life." Now, what if the other person says, "Look, I believe in Jesus and I believe in God, but I do think that this is open to question. I think different people have different views; some medical authorities wouldn't treat "it" as a normal human being so I really think that I am not reinforcing murder, I am simply saying that this woman has the right to determine what happens to her own body." And then you reply; "No, she hasn't that right; she hasn't the right to kill a human being." And he replies, "But she doesn't believe it's a human being so she doesn't believe that it's murder; she believes she has the right to control her own body." Now, do you have a tendency to say, "Anybody knows that this little fetus is a human being? And anybody who is thinking straight knows that abortion is wrong. Now either you are not thinking straight, or you are not a Christian."

Loved ones I do believe that there is even deeper truth than the obvious one in what God says to us this morning in that kind of context. Maybe you'd like to look at it. It's his word, and I do believe that it speaks not only to that situation but to something deeper in our own relationship with him. Its Romans 14:3, "Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him." And you may say, "Well, what do dietary fads have to do with abortion? What has that got to do with what we have just been talking about?" The fact is it's not just a dietary fad. God speaks a lot in his word about this whole question of eating meat and eating vegetables. You might say that you don't see why a Christian would ever even dream of being a vegetarian. I'll show you why they would in Genesis 1:30 loved

ones, "And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food. And it was so." So there God is saying to all the animals and to every living being, "I have given the green plant for food. You may say, "Well that settles it -- it means we should all be vegetarians. Why does any Christian ever eat meat?" Well because of Genesis 9:2-3, "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything."

So there God is saying, "You can eat animals and eat the flesh that you find in animals, you can eat meat." You may say, "Well, that's it, that's why I eat meat." But I would ask you -- why don't you eat kosher of meat -- because look at the next verse in Genesis 9:4, "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood." So now, why do you eat meat out of which the blood has not been drained? And then you reply, "Well, Jesus, by his death abolished all those ritual laws, so we are freed from that and Paul says that all things are clean. That's why we believe we are not tied to what was primarily a ritualistic law."

Now do you see the relevance of it? God is saying to us this morning, "I have spoken about murder in my word and I have spoken a lot about eating meat and not eating meat. I haven't mentioned abortion, but even though I have said so much about eating meat, yet I say this to you, "Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats, for God has welcomed him." And God says, "Despite the fact that I have said many things about eating meat and not eating meat, yet I tell you as my children, do not despise somebody else who says they are our brother and a Christian. Do not look down on them because they have a different view of eating meat to what you have."

Then you see the obvious sequel to that; if that's the situation with eating meat about which his word says so much, let it be particularly the situation in regard to these modern issues that we have. In other words don't let's get ourselves into this position where we despise those who don't take the same view on nuclear disarmament or abortion or war as we do. "Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, for God welcomes him." Why is it so important to have that attitude of love to one another? Not just to keep us all together; not just to maintain unity; not even just because it's intelligent to do it -- there is a deeper reason. It is wrong to judge the authenticity of a person's Christian faith by what they say they believe just as much as it's wrong to judge the authenticity of their Christian faith by the things that they do or don't do. The Christian faith is not, simply, concerned with the facts you believe, or with the things you do, or the things you don't do. The Christian faith that brings us into relationship with our Creator is deeper than that.

That's why I would love us to think about this, this morning. It's very fashionable today to identify a relationship with God with certain views of things, or certain practices, or habits in our lives. And so our idea of Christian faith is getting shallower and more superficial as the years go on. This always happens at the end of some kind of movement in society -- the things that people were concerned about become very coarse and become very superficial; they separate themselves into categories and it dissipates in a series of different views and different habits.

Christianity and the faith that brings us close to God are deeper than that. Let's just reflect on what the Christian faith is by mentioning again a sin that we have referred to several times during

this past months. This is a sin that God mentions in scripture and a punishment for that sin that he makes very clear and it's mentioned in Exodus 21:17, "Whoever curses his father or his mother shall be put to death." We said that our reaction to that tends to be "Boy I am glad I am not in the Old Testament dispensation when I would have been put to death for cursing or swearing at my mom or dad or wishing evil upon them. I am glad I am under the Christian dispensation where Jesus has died for us and we just have to confess and ask God to forgive us and then do our best not to do it again." And you remember what we've said -- no -- the penalty for cursing your father or mother is death, whatever dispensation you are under.

The Old Testament dispensation actually physically killed you, but in this dispensation it's still there. Why? Well, why do you curse your father and mother? Or why do you wish they were out of the way? Why do you wish evil upon them? Extend it to anybody -- why do you wish evil upon anybody? Why do you wish that boss would lose his job? Why do you wish so and so would be out of the way? Why at times do you wish -- you don't wish them dead -- but you wish they were out of your hair? Why do you have that kind of attitude to anybody? Is it not because we fear what our mother or father could do to our lives? Is it not because we fear what effect the boss's action could have on our lives, on our prosperity, on our future, on our reputation with other people or on our comfort and our wealth?

Are we not afraid that they can affect us in some way so that we have that gut reaction, "I wish that person was away?" We wouldn't want that if they couldn't have an effect on our lives, but it's because we fear they'll have an effect on our lives; we actually think that our lives are at their mercy. We actually, deep down, feel that what they do will govern our lives and indeed that our lives are, in a sense, at their mercy. If they like us, than we'll prosper, if they don't like us we'll not. If they want evil against us or want to hurt us, they are able to do it. We really, deep down, believe that all God can do is affect a little, at times, the general influence that their lives have on our lives. Isn't that why we only resort to him at odd moments when everything else fails; because deep down we don't think that he can change their attitude -- we don't think that he can over rule their actions? We don't think that our lives -- our professional lives, our job lives, our career lives, our financial lives, our family lives, our school lives -- are actually in his hands. We think they are actually in the hands of all the myriad people we have to deal with at school, and at home, and at work.

Now that's why we end up cursing our fathers or our mothers, or wishing them out of the way. That's why we end up cursing our boss or wishing our neighbor out of the way; because we feel that they really have our lives in their hands. And is it not true, loved ones that that attitude is built into us right through every grain and every part of the texture of our bodies? Is it not true that our whole being operates that way? Is that not why, when the bank account goes down, the heart pumps immediately -- you don't have to tell it to pump -- it just pumps because your whole life is oriented that way. It's utterly convinced, whatever you say in your best religious moments, that you are at the mercy of the banker, you are at the mercy of the boss, you are at the mercy of your wife, you are at the mercy of your children, you are at the mercy of your colleagues, and you are at the mercy of your professors. It's because of that, that your whole being is utterly dependent on what we call "the world." The world of people, the world of circumstances, the world of things, the world of the economy; you feel that's what determines your life's direction and that is shot all through your being. That's what sin is. I don't blame you, if you don't think that's not sin, but that's where all our problems come from; that's the disease or the sickness that has to be dealt with, and cursing your mom or your dad is just a symptom.

We used the example of the person who has a certain symptom of a disease. He goes to doctor and says "Treat the symptoms, treat the symptoms." Or he tries to put the symptoms right while the disease continues rampant inside. Now that's why God says the only remedy for cursing your father or mother is death. He is saying to us, "I myself would curse my father or mother if I depended the way you do on the affect they can have on your lives either for good or for evil. I myself would wish the boss out of the way if, like you, I felt my life was in his hands and not in my hands." He is not knocking us for doing that. He is saying that the reason you do it is because your trust, your dependence, your whole faith attitude is in these people. And these things and these people and this world is utterly unpredictable and utterly unreliable, so you are constantly going to be wishing these people out of the way if you put your faith and your dependence upon them. He is saying to us, "You are so shot through with that kind of faith in the world that the only way I can get rid of that sin sickness inside you is to destroy it and you; because you are both utterly intertwined with each other."

That's why God says the only cure for the sickness of sin is death with his son. He says "All you can do if you want to be my child, if you want to be related to me, is go to my son because I placed you in him and I destroyed you in him, and I remade you in him. Go to him and ask him, 'Lord Jesus, show me how you destroyed me and show me what attitude in me you destroyed. Show me what attitude you've replaced it with so that I can express it.'" That is the personal interview and encounter with Jesus that any child of God has to go through every day. It's a continuous, sensitive relationship with Jesus that believes that you were actually changed in him and that you can experience that change by personally asking him to tell you what particular side of your nature he destroyed and how he remade it and therefore how you are to express it. And as you do that day-by-day, you are related to God and your life begins to relax and you begin to back off the adrenaline and the worry and the anxiety. Then Jesus' death and resurrection, by which he remade you, begins to be manifested in you, and you begin to be changed as a person. You begin to be changed and day-by-day you begin to change. You don't understand how it comes except that you know it is connected with the mighty work that God did in Jesus and that it's just being manifested in you day-by-day.

Satan comes along and whispers, "Now if you are really a child of God, will you not believe this about abortion? Will you not believe this about nuclear disarmament? Will you not believe this about prayer in schools? I mean other people are children of God and they all have these views. Are you not a child of God too? Will you not believe the same things as them? If you are a child of God, will you not behave this way? And will you not behave that way? And will you not behave the other way? All of your other (Christian) brothers and sisters are doing it, why won't you do it?"

So Satan tries to get you to change the ground of your justification before God -- the ground of your salvation, the ground of your acceptance with God -- from that daily interview with your dear savior Jesus, to things that you have to do to be a Christian or things that you have to believe to be a Christian. He's trying to get you to move from believing and trusting a person; your dear friend Jesus, to believing certain tenets of the faith. He's trying to get you to move from trusting and obeying the day-by-day and moment by moment movements of Jesus' Spirit showing you what he did for you on Calvary, to certain behavioral habits and certain legalistic obedience's, that everybody is supposed to obey.

It's interesting; Satan is never completely wrong, you see. There is some truth in what he says, he doesn't speak just untruth, he often speaks a lot of good truth; he often speaks the truth about

abortion. He often speaks the truth about nuclear disarmament or about all the other things. It's not that those things that he urges are wrong, but it's the use he makes of them as he tries to drag you by the nose, out of salvation by faith, back into salvation by works of law, or salvation by eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil so that when someone comes in who thinks differently from you about abortion, you'll go for him because you are utterly convinced that anybody who thinks that just isn't a Christian. And it's not long before you lose all the sense of graciousness of that personal relationship with Jesus; you'll lose it in the midst of a series of beliefs that you have to believe if you are a Christian, or a series of things that you have to do if you are Christian.

Do you know that Augustine, one of the great fathers of the church, went to extremes to speak against this? It's a dangerous one when shared in our society, but he said it and he obviously was determined, somehow, to get this over to his congregation. He said, "Love God, and do what you like." In other words, concentrate on loving the Father. Concentrate on coming into a trusting relationship with your savior, Jesus, and then let his spirit show you what you have to do day-by-day. In that way you will be a great family of many sided, many faceted pictures of Jesus; you won't be a bundle of stereotypes who all believe this and all think this and all do that.

Do you know there is a verse in the Bible that is almost as dangerous? It says, "The spiritual man is judged by no one." [1Cor.2:15] That is, the person who goes day-by-day to Jesus and has that little interview, "Lord, I know you destroyed me in yourself on Calvary, Lord show me what you've changed in me that you want to manifest today, and reveal to me what you've made me today." Everybody who has that little interview walks by the [Holy] Spirit and can be judged by nobody else. Another person can say, "You know I wondered at the way you are going" and we delight to test it against scripture, but they can't really say you ought not to do that. All they can say is, "Well as Jesus told you this, and there are other marks in your life that show that you are walking in his way, then you have the right to go that way."

When I was in Belfast I was a liberal Methodist minister and I probably didn't know any better; I really wasn't sure if this was God's wording, so that leads to a lot of trouble. I was working in a city mission in Belfast and city mission work in European cities is involved a lot in helping people -- poor people who have not enough food, not enough clothing and then of course it's a very Evangelistic outreach on Sundays and Saturdays. So I was involved in a city mission and at times in doing funerals in different parts of the intercity and one of these funerals that I did when I was a young Methodist minister who really knew very little, but I was involved in going to this house and conducting the funeral. There was a little pastor there who was doing a prayer; I was doing the big thing, and he was doing a little prayer. It was a case of the old saint and a young one. I discovered that this man's name was Pastor Evans and he was a saintly man and an Evangelical preacher and had been for years in Belfast; one of those saints that you rarely meet. I got into conversation with him, and we met several times after that and talked. He told me he was Welsh, and he had that Welsh lilt to his voice. He told me about a certain situation, he presumably knew where I was, and knew what God had to say to me through him. He told me a story about a barman who was converted in his services in a little hall called the Iron Hall. I think it was called that because of an iron roof the rain rattled down on all the time. So he had a barman that was converted in the services who prayed through and received Jesus and came into a real relationship with him. He said, "Pastor Evans, I am a barman, I serve in a bar in Belfast. I suppose I have to give up my work." And I thought that Evans, being an Evangelistic preacher, would say surely that's the devil's place; you should be well out of the bar and get into some Christian work of some kind. But Evans replied to him in that Welsh voice, "No good boy, no; don't leave the bar; you stay in your job and you pray

for your customers and you witness to them.”

That’s exactly what that guy did. It was interesting to me, as a kind of a liberal guy in those years, to realize that here was a man, who surely must stick closer to this word [the Bible] than anybody else I knew, and yet when it came to that situation, he said “Get your relationship with Jesus right, and then do what he tells you. Don’t get rail-roaded into legalism -- either in your beliefs or in your practices.” And loved ones it seems to me while we listen to God’s word and take that attitude “let not him who eats despise him who abstains for God welcomes him” while we take that attitude not only to each other, but especially to ourselves, the life of Jesus and the life of God will remain alive inside us in a sensitive and gracious way. Whenever we turn from that daily interview with Jesus and we begin to hammer out these views “that all Christians have and that I have therefore I am a Christian”, or these things that “all Christians do and that I do therefore I am a Christian” the whole beauty of Christianity disappears from your life and you become one of those hard-nosed Evangelicals that drive people away from Jesus instead of driving them to him.

So I would ask you; what is the basis of your daily walk in God? Is it coming to Jesus every morning and saying “Lord I know the only reason I am a child of God is because you included me in yourself in Calvary. I don’t know how, but you included me and you destroyed all the things that needed to be destroyed in me. You brought death to all the things in my attitude that needed to be brought to death in me. Lord would you show me today how you created me in you? Show me part of the new creation that I am in you. Reveal part of it to me today so I can manifest that.” And then you go for it and do what he shows you. Loved ones it’s a different life. I will tell you it’s a lot easier to serve one master than to serve six or seven hundred of us. It’s a lot easier to serve one master than to serve a thousand people who have opinions and views on everything under the sun. You and I are called to serve one master; we were saved by one man’s death, we were delivered into heaven by one man’s resurrection and that one man is the one we need to be concerned with.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus we know in our hearts that this is right; that our whole hope of heaven and our whole hope of any kind of life here on earth depends on you and what you did for us on Calvary. So Lord Jesus we would come to you this morning as we would come to you in future mornings, and we would say we know there are a lot of wrong attitudes in us. We’ve faith in a whole lot of wrong things and wrong people and we have very little faith in our Father, your Father, who alone can affect our lives. Lord we know that you’ve changed us in your death, Savior we believe that; will you reveal to us this morning how you made us new, or what new part of us you want us to see and to manifest to everybody else today? Lord will you show us? Have we had a certain attitude towards our husbands or our wives that is wrong, that puts too much faith in them and too a little in you? Have we had certain attitudes about our jobs where we put too much faith in our job and too little in you? Lord will you show us? And then Lord Jesus we believe that you are showing us things that have already been destroyed and therefore we can walk free of them with almost no exertion of our wills, but simply deciding to do them. So Lord we would; we would go forth now and manifest that this day, this very day. And then Lord Jesus, we thank you that there is no reason for us to look down upon people who have different views to us, or who do different things to us. Lord we remember what you said when Peter said, "What shall this man do?" You said, "What is that to you?" Lord we thank you. So that’s what you say to us when we say, why does this man think this way about abortion? Or why does this man do this? You say to us, “What is that to you? Just keep your eyes on me and I will keep you alive in my Father.” Lord we thank you for that.

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.