

Pleasing God

Romans 14:8

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've often said to one another before that it's very difficult to step outside yourself and look at your own life from a distance. We spend so much time inside our own minds that it just is a great exercise for us to actually step outside of it and try to see ourselves as others see us. It's just hard to do.

You don't spend a lot of time doing it and so it's difficult ever to do it. Yet it is what distinguishes us from animals. You probably know that. The old self-critical faculty is the ability to kind of look at yourself from outside and see what you're doing and why you're doing it. It's what prevents us going on blindly in some activity that is getting us nowhere. Whereas you know a little dog will continue to wrap himself around the tree, it doesn't matter how long, he does it. He'll continue to do it because he can't get outside his own mind and say, "You dumb dog, look what you're doing?" He just keeps on doing what he is doing whereas we, human beings, are different kinds of animals. We are able to get outside ourselves and kind of be self-critical. That is, we are able to look in upon ourselves and see what we're doing and why we're doing it.

That's what I'd ask us to do right this minute. I would ask you to answer this question, what was the basic motive that governed you in your childhood? You might say, "Oh just to be happy as a boy who plays in a sand box, just enjoy myself. That's it, just to be happy." Or somebody else might say, "Well, to get my own way. That's what I wanted as a child, always to get my own way and that's what dominated my childhood." Do you not think there's another motive lying underneath all of those that we all had in common as children?

Do you not think, underneath the skin of every human being born into this chaotic world, there is deep down a desire to fit in? Do you not think we kind of look at this big world and all these big adults around and we look at all the things that are happening and you just feel kind of scared inside? You say to yourself, "Well, I am not going to last long here unless I fit in with it all."

Do you not think that this carries on through a great deal of our lives? We keep on acting on the basis of that. In fact, that kind of becomes the basic motive of our whole life. It becomes the drive that is underneath everything we do. It becomes the undergirding reason for our lives. We kind of subconsciously want to fit in. We want to fit in with everything.

We want to fit in with the world itself. We want to fit in with the people who are important. We want to fit in with the current fashion. We want to fit in with the trendsetters. We want to fit in with the habits that everybody approves. We want to fit in with all the norms that everybody respects. That kind of governs everything we do in our lives.

In fact, in a strange way, Darwin is kind of right about the old animal kingdom -- that the survival of the fittest depends on adapting to your environment. In a way many of us have acted like little animals throughout great parts of our lives. We've governed everything we said or did or thought or ever dreamed of. In the light of this almost self-preservation instinct we have that we ought to try to fit in with everything.

We ought to fit in with what people are thinking. We ought to fit in with what the world expects of us. We ought to do what everybody thinks we should do. Of course, that wouldn't be too bad if the world itself was kind of healthy. Then you would be fitting in with something healthy. But the tragedy is that this old world has decided utterly and irrationally that it has no maker, that it made itself, and that it exists for itself by its own power. So most of this world exists to please itself. So what happens with little ones like us if we govern our whole life subconsciously by this desire to fit in? We find ourselves trying to fit in with a world that doesn't believe there's a maker and that lives for itself and to get its own way. We actually end up living our lives like that too.

Now, it's plain to any of us that any Maker faced with that kind of an irrational creation that he had just finished putting his best ideas into, if we were him, we'd just destroy the creation. We'd just wipe it out. We'd wipe it out if only to prevent the chaos of such a self-centered world extending to the rest of the universe. There's no doubt, loved ones, any Maker would be justified in that.

When he creates something that he had plans for and it turns out the very opposite, he is fully justified in destroying the whole thing and wiping it all out and starting over again. Now, the amazing thing is that our Maker didn't do that. He didn't wipe it all out like that. He found a better solution and if you follow with me during some little twists in reasoning, I think you'll be able to see it. You'll be able to see how it applies to your own life and to my own life. What he did, loved ones, is outlined in a book in the New Testament, Galatians.

Galatians 6:14, "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." It's the middle clause there, "by which the world has been crucified", and you see before that clause it says, "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." That means in Jesus' death "the world was crucified." That's what God did.

He didn't destroy the world but he took the spiritual powers of the world and he brought them to an end in his Son Jesus in a timeless miracle in eternity. In other words, he so controlled the power of a Hitler that his influence would be terminated at death. Hitler's influence would only extend over this earth as far as his death. Then at his death, his influence would cease. So God terminated all the spiritual powers to spread chaos and self-centeredness throughout the universe. He terminated them at death. It doesn't matter how bad we are. It doesn't matter how rotten we are. It all ends at death. We can't expand it beyond that. We can't extend it beyond that. It ends at death.

God has so arranged the death and destruction of the power of evil in the world that it all ends at death. Actually those powers then will be walled in to a certain place that is known in the Bible as hell. They will be walled into a certain place. They will be held there forever to destroy themselves. So God, in Jesus, has destroyed the power of the world of evil to extend itself beyond death.

Now, the amazing thing is that this is the future expression of that destruction of the world. But actually it is backdated into our present world. I'll show you the verse which explains this. Romans 8:20, "...for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope." In other words, God has actually backdated that destruction that occurs in hell down through our present centuries so that we're aware of it. We're aware of it, for one thing, through our conscience.

When you do something that fits in with the world and doesn't fit in with God; when you do something or think something that fits in with the world, or exerts your own way and tries to glorify yourself, or tries to make something big of yourself -- your conscience registers that the thing will be terminated at your death and that it's wrong.

In other words, your conscience tells you that a certain thing is wrong because it is still aware of the death and destruction that is going to come to you at the end of this life if you continue as you are. That's why "conscivi" in Latin, means "to know very well." The conscience knows very well something that you don't know. You can't look with binoculars down the road and see what this present action will lead to 70 years hence but your conscience can and your conscience yells at you, "Stop, stop! You're going to destruction if you continue that way." That's what the conscience is.

It's kind of the shadow of hell backdated down to our present time and our present life. So, in a sense, the destruction that God wrought in Calvary is recognized by our consciences continually. That's why your conscience will tell you at times things differently from my conscience. Because your conscience knows what God is dealing with you about in your own life and he knows what he has had to destroy in you in Jesus, his Son. He is letting you know that so that you could accept it and be free of it because if you don't, it'll be destroyed in hell forever.

So your conscience registers that. That's one way in which the destruction that God has wrought in the world in hell is backdated down through our present life. Another way is "Murphy's Law". God has destroyed the evil powers in the world and has sent certain futility through this present physical world to let us know that everything is not right. Otherwise we would kind of think, "Oh, this is wonderful. This is the way the world should be."

God has allowed certain repercussions and certain reverberations from the destruction of the world in hell to come back down through our present life. So, why does your seatbelt always fall outside the car door and not inside? Why do those Murphy's Law things happen? Why does a thing go wrong if it can go wrong? Because the Creator has built in certain parts of the destruction that he has wrought in Jesus into our present material world to let us know that something is rotten in the state of Denmark. There is something not right here. This is a world that has gone astray. It's a world that has fought its way out of its Maker's control. That's why those things occur.

Now the amazing thing, loved ones, is the other side of the crucifixion. Because God has done something else besides destroying the evil powers of the world in his Son Jesus. Look at it if you would. Ephesians 2:4-5, "But God who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." God destroyed all the evil in you and me, and the world and our circumstances that needs to be destroyed, and he raised us up. He made us the way we were meant to be at the beginning -- new and clean and whole and well.

That is why at times an alcoholic who has been an alcoholic for 30 years will still have a strange hope that he could change. A strange hope will come from nowhere that he can change. And with respect to all of you who are Christians, it can come to an alcoholic who has no touch with Christianity. There can be people in all kinds of hideous situations of hopelessness. Somehow there will come through the darkness a ray of light, "I can change." Now where does it come in such an old black destroyed world? Where does that hope come from? It comes from the fact that the alcoholic has actually been raised up in Jesus and sits at God's right hand. He can live there forever if he

believes it, if he will have faith. If he doesn't, he will spend eternity in hell, but it's because of that raising up of all of us in Jesus that God has done. Even an alcoholic can have that feeling. You have had it yourselves, haven't you?

There have been dark, dark moments in your life when you've been without a job. There have been dark moments in your family life when everything has seemed hopeless. You don't know where it comes from but there's been a strange rising up of hope within you. "This thing could turn around." That's an echo of the great turning around that God has carried out already in his Son Jesus.

That's why a Churchill can turn up in history or, Roosevelt can turn up at the right time to give hope to many. That's why I think you'd say Reagan was a good thing. That's why a Reagan can turn up. In national history, when everything looks black, when the hour seems absolutely hopeless, there seems to be something beautiful that rises up in the midst of it.

Loved ones, it's because God has actually made the world as it was meant to be in his Son Jesus and he is allowing echoes of that to be backdated down through our present life. Now everybody experiences that, even those who reject this whole belief, everybody experiences that. That's why amazing miracles happen among people who don't even believe in God.

Everybody experiences something of that mighty work of destruction and resurrection that God has wrought in his Son Jesus. Now if they experience it, how much more those of us who believe it? Because the fact is, not only is the futility of the destruction backdated but the liberty of the victory is backdated also. So all of us who are raised up and made new in Jesus will actually live in a state called heaven, where the limitlessness of God's powers will be extended throughout the whole universe in our lives.

The amazing fact is that just as the futility can be experienced today in Murphy's Law, the liberty can be experienced today in our own lives. Every time you or I will with God, in dependence on God, in a desire to fit in with God, in a longing for God --and we reject fitting in with the world and depending on the world -- every time we act and will in regard to God in dependence, he brings the victory of what he wrought in Jesus into our lives. And actually our cancer can be healed because it was borne in Jesus on Calvary.

The conflict in the home can be resolved because God has destroyed those elemental spirits of the universe that caused the anger and the irritation in his Son Jesus. Every one of us who believe that and live according to that, see that victory made real in our present lives. Now loved ones, that's why this verse is true that we're studying today. Romans 14:8, "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." It doesn't matter whether it's Hitler. It doesn't matter whether it's Oswald [Lee Harvey Oswald-who shot John F. Kennedy]. It doesn't matter whether it's the cruelest dictator that ever lived or the most cowardly murderer that ever lived. All of them live and die unto the Lord.

They live only under God's permission and their evil can extend only as far as God allows it and it will be brought to an end in death as God wants it brought to an end and they will be under God's control in death as they really have been in life. If we live, we live unto the Lord; if we die we die unto the Lord. It's the same with us here. Whatever we do, we live and die unto the Lord.

Loved ones, who should you please? Not all of us here. We'll probably die before you and if we don't, we have no power over the next world. There is only one who has power over you and me. There

is only one final arbiter. There is only one who made us and who will receive us to himself at the end. That's the God who made us and created us and controls all the things we've talked about during these few minutes. If we live, we live unto him and if we die, we die unto him. If we drink, we drink unto him and if we eat, we eat unto him, and if we eat meat, we eat meat unto him, and if we eat vegetables, we eat vegetables unto him, and that's what Paul is saying.

All these things that we're all arguing about, the little things that you think these people should do and these people shouldn't do. Forget it. Don't please them, please your God. He is the one to whom you have to give account and it's the same with all of us, you know. Those of us who have habits that are definitely wrong, those of us who drink too much, those of us who smoke too much, those of us who are promiscuous, those of us who do things that we know are wrong, it's the same with us.

Really, we can all give you advice but it's your God and what his conscience within you has said, that's who you'll have to deal with. So deal with him. Do what you know he wants you to do. It's the same with all the other things, the things that so many Christians argue about, whether you should fight or whether you shouldn't fight, whether you should have nuclear disarmament or whether you shouldn't have, whether you should have abortion or whether you shouldn't have. It's all those things have to be dealt with in the light of what our God wants us personally to do. Because if we live, we live unto the Lord and if we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.

Loved ones, that's something that each one of you, you alone, can take care of personally. There comes a time when it doesn't matter how much we love each other. It doesn't matter how close your husband is to you or your brother or your sister. It doesn't matter how you listen to some man like me. It's between you and your God and you need to have things right between you and him.

So, make whatever changes he has told you to make in your conscience. Do them! Make them because there will come a time when the destruction that has already taken place in Jesus will be manifested in the hell -- and the resurrection that has taken place in Jesus will be manifested in the heaven. You determine which you go to by how you respond to that mighty work here in this life.

So I would encourage you, don't fit in with this world. Don't! Just stop it. Even this Christian world, even this great Christian world because it can be just another subtle version of the world. Don't fit in with the world. Instead, fit in with God. He is the only one that counts in the end. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we know these things are true. Our own conscience witnesses to their reality. Lord God, we would now, at this very moment, make the changes that you have told us to make through our conscience. Lord, we would not treat our conscience any longer as a kind of school time hangover. Lord, we see it as a warning, a warning of what has already been destroyed in Jesus. It's a warning to us that we're holding on to something that has already burnt up. Lord, if we don't let go of it, we'll be burnt up ourselves.

So Father, we would abide by the signals that we have received through our conscience and we would live our lives to please you and to fit in with you. We will not fit in with this world that has turned against you. So Lord God, we commit ourselves to this kind of honest living for the sake of the death of Jesus for us, and for our own salvation.

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.