

God Loves You Whatever You're Like!

Romans 5:7a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Why are we here? That is, not why are we in the theater (the meeting hall for this talk) but why are we here on this earth? Why are you alive? Why am I alive? You know that we keep on giving secondary answers like to make money or to have children or to be successful. But many of us are still bewildered about why we are alive at all. You know the answer that God has shown us. We're here so that we can live forever in fellowship with him. That's really why we're here at all.

That involves two problems: how can a holy, just Creator accept unholy people like us and secondly, how can we ever become the kind of people that he would want to spend eternity with? Those are really the two problems that we've seen that Jesus answers. Most of us have problems when it comes to the second one.

We know that God accepts us because Jesus has died and paid the price of our unholiness. Therefore, God is free to accept us. But many of us who call ourselves Christians have problems at the second step, becoming like God so that we will be enjoyable for him to be with for eternity. It's at that point where many of us run into real problems in our Christian life.

We call it sanctification, this business of becoming like God. You find it, if you want to look at it, in Romans 8:29. That's where the truth is expressed. It is really the truth of sanctification, God making us like himself. Romans 8:29: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son." And that's it. God wants to conform us to the image of his Son.

Now it's at that experience where many of us begin to run into difficulties. You can't make free agents (like us), like Jesus unless you begin to show them in what ways they're not like Jesus. You want them to enter into it willingly so you can't make them like Jesus by putting them to sleep and just making them wake up the next morning like Jesus. That would be taking away their free will. The only way to get free agents to be like Jesus is to begin to point out where they're not like him.

Now that's where many of us who are Christians fall into difficulties. Soon after we are converted, the Holy Spirit begins to point out the inward sin inside us: the selfishness that nobody sees, the jealousy that nobody sees, the anger that we never express, the pride that is deep down in all our motives and our ambitions. The Holy Spirit begins to show us these things and many of us at that point throw up our hands in horror and say, "Oh, God couldn't possibly accept a person like me. I must not even be a child of God".

Now do you see dear ones that you're a child of God, accepted by God not because you're good, not because you're pure and not because you're utterly unselfish? It's because Jesus died for all your selfishness and that's why you're a child of God. But it happens with many of us that when the Holy Spirit begins to work on us as children of God to take us the second step, (that is, to begin to make us like God), we throw up our hands in horror and say, "Oh, if all that mess is down there, I must not be a child of God. God couldn't possibly accept somebody like me."

Now, loved ones that's why God prompted Paul to write clearly in black and white why God was willing to accept us at all. You'll see it in Romans 5:9. We've talked about this verse often but it is good

to remember it especially if you're beginning to go deeper with God and move into more of the dealings of the Holy Spirit – that experience we call sanctification. It's the basic reason why God accepts us.

Romans 5:9: "Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood." Now God is justified in accepting us not because we're good, not because we're worthy, and not because we're trying harder than we ever did before. It's because Jesus has paid the debt of the death penalty to his justice on our behalf and therefore God no longer has anything against us. We similarly are justified in expecting God to accept us because we can say, "This man has died for us. You don't need any longer to demand our death. He has died for us." That's the reason God accepts us.

But often we come under a kind of false condemnation when the Holy Spirit begins to deal with us. He takes you in your home situation. Your mom or your brother or your roommate say something to you and before you know it, you have spoken out against them in a bad temper. You say to them, "What right have you to treat me like that?" All the irritability, impatience and sarcasm come out from inside you. And if you're looking inside you say, "If I am like that, I couldn't be God's child."

Do you see brothers and sisters you're God's child not because you have none of that down there but because Jesus has died for all that. Jesus has made things right between you and the Father but many of us still rebel against that. Many of us fall under the condemnation that Satan brings and it is Satan. I think it is good to see that for some of us, if you look at Revelation 12:10, you can see Satan's main function in regards to those of us who believe God has accepted us.

Revelation 12:10: "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, 'Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.'" Often when we begin to enter into some of the new conviction of inward sin that the Holy Spirit brings -- when he begins to point out to you that it's not just drinking, it's not just swearing, it's not just these outward sins that we have called sins that matter -- but it's the inward pride.

It's the sarcasm in our voices when we speak to people. It's the critical attitude inside our heart that nobody sees. It's that that God wants to get rid of. When we begin to receive the new conviction of the Holy Spirit that precedes an experience of sanctification, often Satan gets into the act as well and starts accusing us. He says, "Yes, Jesus has died but he has died for people who are better than you. He hasn't died for you."

Many of us get into that position. We say, "Oh yes, Jesus has died for everybody. But he couldn't have died for me. God couldn't love a person as miserable and wretched as I am." That's why we read that verse last Sunday. Jesus, at the very time when we were incapable of doing anything to make ourselves right with God, Jesus died for the ungodly. It's so good to see that Jesus died for ungodly people not for godly people. Yet many of us have trouble.

We still say, "Oh yes, Pastor, I know he died for the ungodly but no he couldn't love me. If you saw into my heart, nobody could love me." Now, why do we feel that? Why do many of us here this morning, when we begin to move into sanctification, suddenly begin to doubt if God can possibly love us?

Well, dear ones the answer is in the verse that we'll study today. If you'd like to look at it, it's Romans 5:7. This is the reason why many of us (though we accepted at one time that God loved us and Jesus had died for us) begin to doubt whether God loves us at all when we begin to move into some

new conviction of inward sin.

Romans 5:7 – “Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man - though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die.” It's because you and I judge God's love according to the world's love. You and I judge God as loving us the way the world loves us and the world always loves us depending on the kind of people we are. It depends on our state. The world looks at us and if we're worthy of love then the world loves us.

So the world says, "Well, for a righteous man, one who just abides by the letter of the law and is morally upright (like a Pharisee), one will hardly dare to die for him at all. But for a good man, a man who not only abides by the law but is warm, loving and generous as well, one might even dare to die for him."

In other words, the world decides whom it loves on the basis of the state of that person's heart and their character. So we have a great tendency to look into our hearts and to say, "God couldn't possibly love me because the world loves me according to the kind of person I am. So if God loves me on the same basis, he couldn't possibly love me." And that's the error that we fall into.

The world does love us on that basis. People hire you on that basis, don't they? They examine you completely. They examine all your abilities and then they decide whether to accept you or not. They fire you on the same basis. If you haven't performed well, they fire you. We get friends on the same basis. It's so often that people love us because we're worth loving. There's something attractive in us or there's something worthwhile in us. We in fact tend to love other people on the same basis, don't we?

We try to love, we tend to love people who are compatible with us or who are attractive to us in some way and we ourselves try to win acceptance by our peers on the same basis. At school, we try to be swingers. We try not to be squares. At college we try to wear beards because beards are in. We try to gain acceptance with other people by being the kind of people that they would want to love.

Now brothers and sisters, that's the way the whole world works. Even the commercials on TV assure you that if you could possibly ever get the sweetest breath in town, then you're set for a married partner for the rest of your life. Or, if you mothers could possibly have hands like your teenage daughter, then family troubles would cease.

Everybody loves someone with sweet breath and with smooth hands. Do you see that we're brainwashed with the idea that you're loved when you're worth loving. You're loved when you have a certain state of heart or a certain character -- then people like you.

You know it works even in marriage which is the highest form of worldly love and human love that we see. So often married people come together because they see something in each other that they want. They love each other because they see something in each other that attracts them. That's why so many marriages fall apart because they cease to see in each other what they want. And so they love each other according to the state of each other's character and heart.

Now brothers and sisters, God's love is absolutely different from that. You just have to face it that God's love is not like human love at all. You know even in Christian circles it comes about. We say we love people's souls. But so often the brothers love the sharp looking girl souls, and the sisters love the sharp looking boy souls. So even in Christian circles, our love is governed by what

the other people are like. Now God's love is not like that at all.

God's love depends not on the character of the person to be loved but depends on the character of the person loving. God's love depends on his own nature. God loves because he is loving, because his heart is filled with love. He doesn't look at a person and say, "Oh, you're nasty and jealous, selfish and proud. I am not going to love you." God loves independent of your nature. Independent of how bad or miserable or rotten you are, God loves. It's utterly different from the world's love.

So do you see it's never right to look at the way other people love us and then say, "Oh, God loves us like that multiplied to the nth degree," -- he doesn't. Human love is based on your character; on the kind of person you are, on whether you're useful or attractive to the other person. God loves you utterly, completely independent of whether you're attractive or not. God loves you because he's a loving Father and his heart is filled with love.

You will never build up your faith by looking at people and their attitude to you. You'll never build up your faith in God's love that way. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. The Bible is full of passages and stories that show you that God loves independent of the person's character that is loved.

Now even in the Old Testament you see it. If you look at Hosea you'll see God's attitude to Israel. In Hosea 11 you'll find that God loves the nation of Israel independent of the character of the nation of Israel. You can see God's heart.

Hosea 11:1-7; "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the more they went from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals, and burning incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. They shall return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them in their fortresses. My people are bent on turning away from me; so they are appointed to the yoke, and none shall remove it."

Now here is God's heart coming out. Hosea 11:8-9 – "How can I give you up, O Ephraim, how can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboi'im! My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy."

Brothers and sisters, God is God and not man. He loves people because he loves them, not because they're worthy to be loved. You see it right through Jesus' life. You remember the times when he does it. Look at Matthew 8 at just one indication with a leper.

Matthew 8:1-3; "When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and behold, a leper came to him and knelt before him, saying, 'Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.' And he stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.'"

Now the leper's skin was not smooth. The leper's skin was peeling and was putrid. The leper's breath was not sweet smelling. It smelled like his body and like his disease. Jesus saw nothing in the

leper that was useful to him but he loved the leper. Loved ones, Jesus looks at us in the same way. However leprous we are in the inside, Jesus loves us independent of the kind of people we are.

You'll find it with Zacchaeus who was a traitor to his country. He was just a quisling, a fellow that was being used by the occupation forces to milk finances from his own people. Yet when Jesus came together with him, he asked him, "Can I come to your house for tea?" The Pharisee said, "Why do you have anything to do with a sinner like that?" Zacchaeus was not a popular man and he was not a man that everybody wanted to be with. But Jesus loved him.

Now brothers and sisters, God continues to love us even as he is showing us the ways in which we are not like Jesus. God not only loves us but Jesus has died for all of us. God has atoned for all of the stuff that he's even showing you inside your heart. He has atoned for it all. In other words, the death of Jesus is for all of us whatever state our hearts are in. Whether we've been Christians for years or whether we're not Christians, Jesus has still died for us.

Now that's different from saying we are all therefore accepted by God. God loves us all but he doesn't accept us all. He can only accept those of us who repent and who trust him. So it is important to see that. Some people have perverted "God loves everybody" into "God accepts everybody". God can only accept those who come to him. It's like having a lifeboat in a raging sea. The ship is going down and the lifeboat is available but survivors have to get into the lifeboat in order to be saved, otherwise they will be lost.

Now, it's the same with God. God loves us all. There's no question. Loved ones, do you see there's no question as to whether God loves you or not. There's just no question of it. There's only a question in your mind when you look at human beings and you see them despising people who aren't attractive and who aren't winsome and who aren't personality people.

It's only difficult for you then to believe that God loves you. But if you look at God as he appears in Jesus and as he appears through the Bible, you'll have no doubt that God loves you. Of course he loves you but he can only accept you when you begin to come towards him in repentance and in trust. But God does love you.

Do you see there's no question of God's love? If you want God's love, it is there. The only people who cannot believe in God's love this morning in the theater are people who will not believe. I know that's hard but that's the way Jesus put it. Jesus said, "There are some people who will not believe." They have all the ground, all the basis for believing, but they won't believe.

Now you see that in Luke 22:67. Jesus put it strongly and there are two Greek words for the negative "ou" and "mn" (oo may) and he uses both of them to emphasize there are some people who just will not believe. It doesn't matter what you say to them. Remember the priests and scribes are speaking to Jesus. Luke 22:67; "If you are the Christ, tell us." But he said to them, "If I tell you, you will not believe."

Now brothers and sisters, the only way not to believe that God loves you is to actually will not to believe. And if you keep looking at human beings and their attitude to you then you are willing not to believe because you keep on saying what is not true. You keep on saying, "Yes, that's the way God loves me. He loves me like human beings love me. They love me when I am attractive or when I'm good. That's the way God loves me."

If you will to believe that way, then you cannot enter into truth at all and you live a lie for the rest of your life. Now here are some of the people who do that and the psychologists have helped us in this. Some people say, "Well, I had a cruel father. I had a father who wasn't loving at all. He was hard and impersonal. He laid down the law to the family all the time." Or, "I had no father." Or, "I had a father that left my mother and abandoned me." And they say, "Now you tell me, how can I possibly believe in a loving heavenly Father if I had a father like that?"

Do you see that it wouldn't matter if you had the greatest father in the whole world? His human love is nothing like God's love. Do you see that's only a cop out that we've been enabled to enter into through psychology? Do you see that it doesn't matter if you had an angelic father? His love is nothing like God's love. Because even his love is tainted a little with your own state and your own character. God loves differently from any father.

Some of us say (and you know it came in through liberal philosophy and through humanism), "Now if my brothers won't love me", (we Irishmen and minority groups say this and are strong on it) "If my brothers and sisters won't love me, whom I see, how can I possibly believe that God whom I cannot see loves me?"

Now dear ones, do you see that it wouldn't matter if you were surrounded with the best and most loving friends in the whole wide world? Their love is still different from God's love. It wouldn't give you any better an idea of God's love. The only way you see the way God loves, is to look at the Father and to look at Jesus in the New Testament and to see that he loved the leper who was dirty and smelling. He loved Zacchaeus who was a traitor, a liar and unpopular. And this is the same Jesus who lives this morning and loves you even as (through his Holy Spirit) he begins to expose the jealousy, envy, pride and the sarcasm inside you so as to make you like himself. Yet Jesus is still loving you and he is accepting you because he died for you. It's not because you're perfect and it's not because you're pure.

A lot of us say, "Well, I want to believe that but I can't believe it." Loved ones, everybody has a will free enough that with the aid of God's grace they can believe what God has shown them of himself down through the centuries. Some of us say, "Oh yes, I know many can, but I can't. I've tried and I can't feel God's love."

Brothers and sisters, do you see that your feelings are programmed by other people's attitude to you? If you try to feel God's love then you're dealing with feelings that are programmed by human love and by a human attitude towards you. It's not a matter of feeling God's love; it's a matter of believing God's love. You believe that if God loved a leper, if he loves Zacchaeus, then he loves me. Whether I feel he loves me or not, I believe he loves me.

Loved ones, it's vital to walk in that confidence as we begin to walk into this experience of sanctification. Otherwise, it will just be a desperate, defeating, sorrowful, grief-stricken experience. But if you look at it this way and you see that God loves you independent of what you're like. Even if we are the saintliest person in the whole world God loves you no more than he loves you today. Then you can begin to move into the new conviction of sin that the Holy Spirit brings and begin to move towards crucifixion with Christ and move into it joyfully and confidentially. That's the Father's will for us.

So will you stop looking in? Will you stop judging God by the way other people think of you? Do you know that you're the most lovable person in the world to your Father? Dear ones, do you really know

that? Now would you stop cringing yourself up in a little ball and saying, "Nobody loves me?" That's not fair to your Father. He gave you good hair and a good face and a body that he thinks is good and he thinks he has given you a good personality. Now you have no right to look up to him and complain by saying, "You haven't. You haven't given me the right things and you don't love me."

You've never given your life for anyone. The Father has given his own Son's life for you. So really it's time for us to stop pitying ourselves. God doesn't love you because you're pitiable or because you need sympathy. God loves you because he loves you. He thinks the world of you and he doesn't want you to let Satan get in and persuade you of a lie or let human beings persuade you of a lie. They will never love you as God does. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that when we look at you in Jesus, we don't have any doubt that you love us. Father we can't have any doubts. We see it plainly stated that you love the world so much that you gave your only begotten Son for us. Father we know that. When we look into Jesus' eyes, we see compassion for lepers and for traders and for liars. When we look into your eyes, we see compassion for sinners. We see compassion for confidence tricksters. We see confidence for people who have opposed you and fought against you. Father, we know that that is your attitude to us this morning.

So Lord, we thank you that you are beginning to show us the ways in which we're not like Jesus. We thank you that you accept us not because we're like Jesus but because you love us with all your heart and because Jesus has died so that you could accept us. Father we believe that. We choose to believe that this morning, accept your love, and thank you for it. We trust you for more conviction of inward sin by the Holy Spirit so that we may come into the fullness and the baptism of the Holy Spirit and into real sanctification. For your glory. Amen.