

Law Exposes Sin

Romans 7:7

Sermon Transcripts by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Why don't the Australians fall off and oh the poor people in Singapore? Because they're just on the equator, so some nights they're on the bottom side because the axis of the earth is at an angle and sometimes they're on the top side. So why every night do they not shout at each other, "Grab hold of something and hold on till the sun rises?"

We answer, "Oh well, it's obvious. It's the law of gravity, the law of gravity, that's why the Australians don't fall off." Then I ask you, "Is that law as reliable as the 70 miles speed limit used to be?" And you say, "Oh yeah, yeah, it's more reliable than that because it's a natural law and a natural law states the way nature behaves, not the way it ought to behave. So it's even more reliable than an ordinary law of the road or an ordinary civil law."

Then I ask you, "Well, what makes the law so reliable", and we kind of shake our sophisticated heads and mumble in a generalization, "Oh it's the law, the magnetic field of the earth, that's it." And we give the name magnetic field to it and we feel we've explained it all because we've given it a title and we say, "Yeah the magnetic field, that's what prevents the Australians falling off and means that the people in Singapore can sleep quite happily without tying themselves to their bed every night."

And then I say to you, "Well, is a magnetic field quite a complex thing?" And you say, "Yeah, I think that I could probably produce one by getting electric wire and winding it round a piece of metal and passing electric current through it, I think I could create a magnetic field." Then I say to you, "Then the magnetic field around the earth must be more complex than that because you don't see any wire and you don't see any metal." You of course agree, "Yeah, it must be very-very complex because it's utterly invisible and yet it is true that there are three and a half billion of us little flies here on the earth, spinning through space at thousands of miles an hour and we're not flying off by the centrifugal force. So it must be a very intricate and complex magnetic field."

Then I say to you, "Well then there must be a very complex, clever, intelligent mind behind that," and of course you're driven to agree. It's very hard to say anything else. Very hard to say that it requires an individual human being, with a mind as clever as ours, to make a magnetic field here on earth that we can see and it's very difficult then in the light of that to deny that the complex magnetic field that is around the earth, must not also been created by a very-very clever and intelligent mind.

So it's impossible brothers and sisters, to look at all the most basic facts of our existence here on earth without coming to the conclusion that of course there is some person behind it all and that you remember is, is what is said in Romans 1:19 and some of you will know it off by heart, and others of you who don't may be should look it up and memorize it.

Romans 1:19, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." Really the truth is that all of us know deep down that for conditions to exist as they do today for us, there must be a great someone who

created it all.

I say to you, "Are you not afraid of falling off then?" You say, "No, it never crossed my mind. I don't think there's any chance of me falling off." And you know that all of us have absolute confidence that we will not fall off the earth. We have absolute confidence that that old magnetic field will stay there because deep down, we do feel that the person who created it is still interested in us. We know that.

If he weren't, all he has to do is withdraw the amazing forces that hold the atoms together and we would all burst apart and disintegrate and because that doesn't happen, we all know fine well that the being who created us all in the beginning must still be interested in us. You know that that's why we waken up each morning in life without worrying about whether we're going to fall off bed, hit the ceiling, go right through it and on up forever. We just waken up with absolute confidence that that won't happen.

Then loved ones, why do you waken up at times depressed about your job situation? Why do you waken up at times worried about how the future is going to turn out? Well, you and I can say, "Well, I think it's because I can see the Creator looking after the whole world because after all, that's a pretty big thing to let drop but I really don't think that he is interested in me individually and that's probably why I worry about the one thing and don't worry about the other." Yet loved ones, it's hard to do that in the light of what we know about this Creator. If you look at Matthew 10, you'll see what I mean.

Matthew 10:29, "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father's will. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered." You are of more value than many sparrows. It's kind of hard to say that we're not really sure whether God will take care of our job situation. It's really difficult, isn't it, to say that we can't tell whether God is really interested in whom we're going to marry. It's very hard to say that in the light of what Jesus says there is God's attitude and in the light of the fact that for most of the things in our life, we have to trust God.

Loved ones, you live in absolute relaxation about whether the old heart will keep pumping. You trust the Creator absolutely for the circulation of your blood. We trust him absolutely about the sun rising and setting and yet do you see that there seem to be issues in which we do not trust him. Is it not this that in the things we cannot affect at all, like the sun rising and the sun setting, like the blood circulating and the heartbeat, like falling off the earth or remaining on. In regard to things that we cannot affect ourselves, we're willing to trust God but in the things that we can affect, we refuse to trust. Is it not, you see a determined choice that we make rather than what we so often plead that we're not sure whether he really will take care or not. Is it not that we determinately decide, "Yeah, maybe he has his plan for my life and he seems to have a purpose for everything in the world, so he probably does have a purpose for putting me here but I want to run it myself even so."

In other words, is sin not that kind of independent determination to run your own life in your own way rather than a case of ignorance? See, that's what Paul says it is, back in that Romans 1, if you look at it. Back in Romans 1, Paul says. It isn't a case that you don't know. It isn't a case that you're not sure that God can take care or not, it's just a case that even though you do know that, you simply refuse to let Him.

Romans 1:21 it is and in fact the last part of Romans 1:20 is the clause, "So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened." In other words, dear ones, do you not waken depressed in the morning about your job situation? Do you not go to sleep at night worried about the final outcome of the examination? Do you not sit often in a restaurant wondering and brooding about whether you'll ever marry or whom you'll marry? Do you not do that because you want to do, because you don't want to trust this God to bring about his plan for your life? See that's the definition of sin in the Bible.

You remember its James 4:17, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin". Now brothers and sisters, I kind of put it to you, is it not true that we all know fine well that there is someone holding the whole place together and that if he holds all the place together and he knows when two sparrows fall to the ground, then that he is certainly planning to hold our lives together.

The reason we don't live in trust and relaxation in him about that is because we don't really want to trust him to run it the way we want him to run it. And is the tragedy not that this sin business has a hold on us, that it starts off with just a simple determination, "Lord, you have to look after the heart beating, you have to look after the blood circulating, you have to look after the sunrise, you have to look after the orbiting of the earth but I will look after my marriage, I will look after my job, I will look after my future? I will decide what to do about my vacation. I am the only one I have to consult about what I do in life."

Is it not true that though it starts at that, gradually that sin power seems to have a supernatural hold on us, so that bit-by-bit, it begins to deceive us that this is the way we are living and so we begin to rationalize this utterly abnormal way to treat our Creator until eventually there are so many billions of us living this way that it seems the natural way to live. So, it seems not only natural to get worried about who you're going to marry, it seems utterly natural to be in strain about examinations that are coming on. We rationalize and justify our attitude to the point where we even cease to realize that we are taking part in such an abnormal attitude and behavior. Is that not what happened with Egil Krogh and the plumbers? You remember he was the leader of the so-called plumbers group, appointed to bluff the leak of documents and you remember he just received a sentence for six months imprisonment, just last week?

He admitted himself with regret and remorse and with at last some honesty that he now saw the thing straight, that these things are not done for national security but he said, "In the atmosphere of paranoia that existed back at that time, with the administration and everyone fearful of the protest and fearful of the opposition and the threat of anarchy in the country, in that atmosphere, it became natural to begin to do some of the things that the plumbers were doing, to break into Ellsberg's psychiatrist place and steal. It became natural to do some of those things."

Is that not true that you can get yourself into such a deceptive atmosphere and you can begin to take such an utterly wrong and abnormal viewpoint that certain things are absolutely wrong. Suddenly you begin to do and you begin to rationalize and, is that not part of what happened at that time? It's just the same with ourselves. We leave God out of the reckoning so long and we begin to think of ourselves responsible for our own life for so long that eventually we begin to get used to doing certain things that just are unlawful and are utterly ridiculous and utterly absurd.

Someone has put it like this, "We take things so much into our own hand and leave God out of the

reckoning so repeatedly that the power of sin drives and deceives us into normalizing actions and attitudes that are utterly abnormal." I think that's true, but we ourselves actually end up rationalizing and rationalizing to such an extent that we lose any sense of what is right or wrong at all. Now loved ones, that's why the law exists because God knew that we would get so used to living without him and we would so normalize what we're absolutely sinful and ungodly ways of life that we would eventually lose any sense of what was right or wrong at all and we would become utterly deceived into thinking we were utterly justified in living the way we do and that's the purpose of the law.

If you like to look at it, it's the verse that we're studying today, Romans 7:7.

"What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it has not been for the law, I should have not have known sin. I should not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "you shall not covet."" In other words, Paul says, "If it hadn't been for the law, I was so deceived and so lost and had so normalized my sinful attitude that I didn't any longer know what was right and what was wrong."

So the truth is, dear ones that it doesn't matter how paranoid a President's advisors may become. It doesn't matter how off balance a President himself may even become. It doesn't matter how much they may lose the sense of what is right and appropriate in certain situations. God's law is there to bring home what is right and what is wrong. So you can see it if you look back to Exodus 20:15-16. While I think one can sympathize because we are the same kind of people as Egil Krogh and one can sympathize with certainly what he admits to doing. Yet it is true that God's law is given for exactly this kind of situation.

Exodus 20:15-16, "You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." In other words, if you're trusting your Creator to govern the protestors and you're trusting your Creator to guard the position of the President and you're trusting your Creator to keep order in the country then you can afford not to steal and not to bear false witness against your neighbor. Even you know, though we may try to justify the break-in or we may try to justify the enemies or we may try to justify the lying about the bombing in Cambodia on the basis that we had to do good, we had to do evil in order to do good. Yet God's word even speaks to that in Romans 3:8. So however lost we may get in our political life in the morass of pragmatism, yet God's law is always there to pull us back to reality and that's why of course the Father says we have no excuse about sin. We can't plead that we were just deceived because his law is there to undeceive us.

Romans 3:8, "And why not do evil that good may come?" And Paul says that some people slanderously charge us this way, their condemnation is just. And so God says, "No, that is not a legitimate principle. It is not a legitimate principle to do evil that good may come." What is the way? Well, the way is Romans 13:1d there and it's the only way any of us can do who are in any position of leadership whether it's Krogh and the Plumbers or whether it's ourselves in our situations at work. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." Really it's the only position a President or anyone to take, isn't it? I've been given my position by God, God is the one to defend me and once I start standing for myself in order to defend my position I'm beginning to normalize an attitude of sin, but there are representatives, you and I elected them.

I don't know that we can afford this morning to apply God's word to Krogh and the others because they are freely elected representatives and our President we elected. I mean those who are under 18 may try to escape but the rest of us have to face the music. Loved ones, where did they learn their

pragmatism? Where did they learn that it's right to do evil that good may come? Where did they learn that it was right to lie to preserve something that you thought was worth preserving? How did such a saintly group of people as us, ever end up electing people like that?

You know the truth. Loved ones, the truth is you have to love the dear souls because we produced them. And it's because man like Krogh lived with people who lied when they couldn't get an assignment done, they lied so that they would have another week to get it in, it's because people like Nixon and his advisors existed in our kind of society that they ended up cutting it fine on some issues. In other words, is God not saying to us this morning, "To what extent does pragmatism run your life? To what extent have you normalized the situation so that you no longer sense that it may be wrong?" He is saying really, "My law is to bring out that in your life." That's what I think we should learn from Watergate.

I think we're mad if we start condemning Nixon and saying he is guilty because no one has said that. I think we're mad if we start condemning Ehrlichman and say he is guilty but I think we can be wise people and we can stop trying to defend what is wrong obviously to all of our minds and we can start allowing God to bring home to our hearts, to what extent we have normalized this kind of behavior ourselves? Old Paul you know, says, oh well you can see it there, "I would not have known what it was to covet unless the word, the law said you shall not covet." Think of how easily we avoid coveting by giving it instant release, that is, we sign one of those clever little mortgage documents or we sign a little loan agreement and immediately we are relieved of coveting, immediately, because we have the car sitting there outside the door or we have the new davenport sitting there.

I am sure that's reasonable and justifiable in certain situations but it would be interesting, wouldn't it to examine to what extent we have got ourselves into ridiculous financial buying, by really what is repressed or suppressed or over-expressed coveting. It would be interesting to examine, wouldn't it? You must admit the outcome is rarely a building. Those of us, who have found ourselves squeezed on all sides by having sent the salary before we ever got it, know what a tremendous blessing those loan agreements can be.

It would be interesting to know how many of them we enter into because God really directed us and how many of them are simply over-expressed or licentious or repressed or suppressed coveting. Coveting is a desperate desire to have something for yourself and I know it's a way of life with us and I know that may be God wants us to do that with some things but I wonder does it wanted us to do it with all the things?

I wonder how many purely luxury items we have gotten ourselves into imprisonment for? I wonder how many of us are unable to change our jobs, are unable to consider full-time service for God because we're in such a tremendous financial bind, because we have borne ourselves down with all kinds of payments and commitments. Well, this is one of the fresh things about God's law. You have to answer that actual question for yourself because I am certainly not saying that loan agreements are wrong but I am asking you, let God's law speak to you on coveting and Paul says, "I would not have known what it was to covet if the law had not said thou shall not covet".

Now brothers and sisters, that's the purpose of the law, to express where we may have got so used to living without God that we have now normalized the situation and no longer realized the mess we're in. God's law is here to come home to our hearts, to shake us and say, "Think, what are you doing? What kind of attitude do you have to your Father in this regard? Why do you covet?" "Well, we covet

because we want something desperate". "Why do you want it desperately?" "Well, we want desperately because there seems to be a chance that we may not get it. We have to want it desperately in order to get it." "Why is there a chance that you may not get it?" "Well, I mean God may not want me to have it." But don't you see that most of our breakings of God's law can be traced back to the fact that we actually don't trust him and are not relaxing in him to give us what we need when we needed.

Now I agree with you that most of us have found that even after we see this, this morning, there is still wriggling in within the inside of us, a tremendous desire to have what we want when we want. And I agree with you that that old self seems to have achieved supernatural power and I agree with you that it's just not a matter of coming to an intellectual decision this morning. You cannot change that selfish will just by your own ability because you have changed it and so have I, a thousand times and changed it back the next week. The truth is that the only way to get it really changed is to let God take that old self that wants its own way and that wants its own things when it wants them and commit them to death in Jesus.

In other words loved ones, to really be ready to take your place alongside Jesus and to say, "Lord Jesus, whatever you are willing to have, that's what I am willing to have. If you are willing to get along with one garment, I am willing. If you are willing to get along with one pair of shoes, all right, I am willing. Whatever your Father wants me to have, that's what I want to have and I commit now to death with you, all that desire that I have for things that God doesn't want me to own."

Loved ones, that's it and you have a dear Father. We have a dear Father who has given us everything you have. He has given you that faith that you have and that body. He has given you more than any other person in the whole world. Is he going to delight himself in keeping things from you that you ought to have? The truth is no. You can trust your dear Father to give you what you need. What he wants you to do is commit that old self to the death that wants what it wants when it wants and begin to enter into just a normal life of trust in your Father.

Really tomorrow morning, will you worry about falling off the earth? Not a bit. You just trust him completely. Well, then why worry about the day ahead? Why worry about the job? Why worry about the winter coat or the summer dress? Doesn't your heavenly Father know that you have need of these things and won't he give you every good gift, then he says, "Seek first his kingdom and all these other things will be added unto it," and that's true. So will you allow the law to speak to you and reveal to you where you may have come into, a life of such independence of God in some areas that it's actually begun to deceive you that you are living independent of it. Will you let his law waken you up? It's a good feeling, it really is and that's why the law is a dear friend and a refreshing colleague and counselor. I pray that he will do that. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that the truth makes us free. We thank you that the law has not come to bind us; it has come to free us. We see our Father, how often we have committed ourselves to ridiculous expenditure of money because really deep down, we wanted the thing desperately and Father, we see that that is not your will for your children. We don't see the sparrows with wrinkled brows. We don't see the rabbits without fur.

Father, we see that wherever creation is willing to trust you to give it what it means there, there is peace and freedom from strain. Dear Father, we would commit to the death in Jesus, this thing that wriggles inside us and wants things in its own way at its own time. We would commit that to the death in Jesus. Father, we want to trust you and we want to depend on you to give us all that you

want us to have, not what we want to have.

So Father, we want to open our hearts and our lives to you now and begin to live like your children instead of like people who have rented the ground from you. We want to begin to live like your children with you as our Father instead of with you as our landlord. Dear Lord we thank you that this is what you are, a dear loving Father who will give us every good gift that we need, for Jesus sake. Amen.