

Answer to Condemnation

Romans 8:34

Sermon Transcript by Ernest O'Neill

It's really good to know that you didn't happen by chance, you know. You just didn't happen by chance. You were made by a dear Creator who loves you and he really does know your name. He knows why he put you here, and he cares about you and thinks about you every day. And really, when you begin to sense that, it gives you a great sense of knowing why you're here and knowing what you're doing here. Suddenly you realize, "Well, if the great Significant Other in the world knows me, then I am important to somebody."

And you begin to sense a quietness and confidence in being here. You begin to realize, "I'm significant to him and I know why I'm here, and I know where I'm going." And of course, it affects everything else that you do. You look at the trees, and the lakes, and the mountains, and you sense that you know the person who made all these. So you feel a kind of a communion with them even, because these are his gifts. And gradually, bit-by-bit, you begin to sense that he is real apart from his gifts, and you begin to enjoy his love and his fellowship. You begin to get great satisfaction from him and great peace of mind and a great contentment in being known fully by somebody who loves you.

The more confidence you gain in him as your Father and as the one who owns the Milky Way, and owns all the galaxies, the more confident you begin to feel that he's not going to see you starve. Certainly if he's put you here for a certain purpose he's not going to let you die out through exposure or starvation and you begin to sense, "He is going to provide all that I need." You begin to feel a great sense of security, even physical security, as you realize that you were put here by a dear Creator who loves you and he is your Father and cares about you day-by-day and will meet all your needs.

That's the way it's meant to be, and that's the way that it is for a lot of us here -- I really do think that -- I think a lot of us here live like that. But I think you would probably agree with me that some of us here don't live like that. Some of us here don't like the idea of somebody else running our lives. Or, we've been brought up in an intellectual atmosphere where we're encouraged to feel that you are to do the jobs you want to do, the way you want to do them and to live your life the way you want to without any reference to any creator that might be around. So there are some of us here this morning, I'm sure, that aren't very conscious that the Creator, whoever he may be, is also our Father who loves us, so we find ourselves really cut off from his love.

But the killer is, even though we're cut off from any awareness of his love by our own desire to do without him, yet we still have a basic structure that he gave us -- that is -- we still have a personality that needs his love. And many of us, I think, find ourselves in that dilemma; we don't have his love -- we aren't sure whether he's really there or not, and we haven't managed to establish much of a personal relationship with him and yet we find ourselves with a personality that does cry out for love. We need love and we need the love that makes us feel we are important -- the love that makes us feel we're something more than just one of three and a half billion ciphers in a huge planet. And you know of course, what most of us do in those situations who aren't receiving it from our Creator -- we just go mad to get somebody to give us that sense of significance -- and so we're involved in all kinds of ridiculous circus antics.

We're trying to earn more money than everybody else so at least we'll be significant that way. We're trying to gain more influence than everybody else so that we'll have some importance that way -- we know our employees don't really love us, but at least they appear to look up to us and it gives you a sense of importance. We know at times our families don't think we're the most wonderful people, but at least we can use them to give ourselves a sense of importance. We'll ride a different motorbike than everyone else. We'll drive different cars than everybody else. We'll dress in different clothes than everybody else. We'll do anything to get some of the feeling of love or sense of importance that love gives you that we were really meant to get from our Creator -- but now we try to get it from each other.

It's the same with happiness. We were meant to walk through God's garden with God right beside us in a sense of complete openness. You know, he's a person that doesn't hold anything back -- he's uninhibited and he's open. He knows everything about us so you're not afraid to let him know things. There's a great sense of being known and being fully known when you know God. And of course we miss that and we miss the happiness that that brings, we miss the satisfaction that that brings, we miss even the exhilaration that brings. And those of us who miss that, of course, try to get those things elsewhere -- and that's what many of us are involved in.

There probably isn't one of us here that hasn't had boy/girl problems or man/woman problems, and they all center around that -- we're trying to get from another person the sense of being known -- being fully known -- that we sense we should have. We sense somebody should know all about us. Somebody should know the bad and the good. Haven't we all made fools of ourselves going out on a limb with some girl or some guy that didn't feel the same way about us -- but we were so desperate for somebody to know us fully?

Then it gets into the realm where you want the satisfaction or exhilaration of the physical or emotional thrills. We're trying to get those and many of us are putting our marriages almost on the rocks because we're still trying to get the thrill or excitement or exhilaration that no poor, little, puny human being can ever give us.

But we're not getting it from God so we have to get it from somewhere -- from danger, or from alcohol, or from drugs -- from something.

And it's the same with the security thing -- nobody here can make themselves secure -- you know it. Just look at Howard Hughes -- the fella was a bundle of neurotic insecurity and yet he surely had more ability to make himself secure than probably any of us will ever have.

And yet we don't have that connection with our Creator -- we don't have the connection with the person who brings that wind down that he brought down yesterday evening, or brings the darkening of the skies down. We don't have that connection with that dear Person so we feel very insecure -- and we're always bound up trying to make ourselves feel secure. So you know, it becomes the money grabbing, or it's "if we could only get ourselves in a job that you couldn't lose. If you'd only get yourself in a job that nobody could take away from you. If you could only get the home paid for, then at least -- well, you'll have the taxes. They can go up and up but still, you keep hoping that somehow you'll win." You have a feeling that you can't beat the system, but you keep trying to beat the system -- you keep trying to make yourself secure.

And of course, loved ones, in doing that -- in trying to get the love from the world that we can only get from our Creator, in trying to get the sense of security, and significance, and happiness

that any love brings us from the world -- our personalities have been completely turned upside down, really. They're working outside in. They were meant to work inside out. In other words, we were all meant to stride through the world with absolute security, an absolute sense of our own importance, an absolute sense of our own place in the world, no problem with identity crisis, completely confident about where we'll get our next meal from. We were meant to walk like that through the world -- with absolute trust in our Father -- with all that love coming into us and through us and then being able to give it out to everyone else so that the whole world would have been chock full with love. That was the Father's plan.

But because we've gone the other way, our personalities have turned upside down. Instead of working inside out, we're working outside in. That's what Paul meant when he said, "The law is spiritual." The law -- all the things that God has told you to do -- are meant to work from the inside out. You're meant to get everything from God that you need and to be able to give everything to other people. But you're not spiritual like the law -- you're carnal. That is, you're fleshly. You're trying to get through your body all the love, and the significance, and the security and happiness that you're meant to get from your Father above.

And of course, the whole system is perverted. There's just a radical perversion, loved ones, in our personality, there really is. We're like automobiles that we've adapted for methane gas and now the owner is running them on gasoline and it's a mess, it's just a mess -- the system wasn't built for that. It's been adapted for methane and it doesn't work. Almost like trying to put the gas through the exhaust pipe, that's almost what we're doing. The gas is meant to go in the tank, the love of the Creator is meant to come into us and go out and be exhausted to everybody else. Instead we're almost trying to get the gas through the exhaust pipe and the whole system is working upside down. That's a radical perversion that has taken place in all our personalities.

That's why God said, "The wages of sin is death." Do you see that? That's why he said that -- "If you live independently of me like that, that's what sin is. If you live independent of me like that, your whole personality is going to become utterly perverted, radically perverted, completely twisted -- and the only thing I can do with it is to kill it, destroy it and start again. That's why the wages of sin is death." That's why God said that. The only thing you can do is to destroy the whole thing and start again.

In other words, loved ones, even if you could receive God's spirit, the spirit of Jesus -- the whole love and life of Jesus, even if you were able to receive it, even if you were able to depend on it for a moment, God is saying, "Your personality is so twisted and so perverted that it's incapacitated for expressing the Holy Spirit I am giving you." There isn't one of us that wouldn't agree with that -- many of us have received Jesus -- but we find our own personality is working the other way all the time. Jesus wants to love somebody, but our personality has gotten used to being suspicious of people and we find a real battle going on. There's something trying to get out but there's something we're trying to get in from other people.

We want to do something for the church but there's an eye to the main chance. We're wondering, "Yeah, but how we can get something out of it for ourselves?" That's the battle we're facing all the time. And it's because the personality is radically perverted. It's twisted, it's an "outside in" personality instead of an "inside out" personality. That's why God said, "The wages of sin is death." Now loved ones, that's what happened on Calvary. Our old self, that old self of yours was crucified with Christ and that's why it was crucified. God destroyed it there so that he could raise it up anew and make it completely different and make it the kind of personality that could

work inside out.

And loved ones, that's why all the psychology books are only useful up to a point. They have no power to change the radical twist and perversion that has taken place in your personality. Only the work that God has done in Jesus can do that. Now of course the moment you acquiesce in that, the moment you sense that that has happened, the moment you agree with it, the moment you allow it to take place in your own life, you come into the kind of situation that Paul describes in today's verse and it's Romans 8:34, loved ones. "Who is to condemn?" So the question comes to you "Who is to condemn me?" Then you turn to John 5:22 and there you find the only one who can condemn you, because he's the only one, really, that can judge. John 5:22, "The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son."

So the only one who can condemn us is the one who is going to judge us on the last day and that's Jesus. So a person who has agreed to what has happened to them on Calvary asks the question, "Who's going to condemn me?" The answer is "Jesus." And then they see the rest of that verse, "Is it Christ Jesus who's going to condemn me who died to prove to me that this did really happen -- that I was crucified with him? Jesus, who was raised from the dead to show me that God had accepted that death and that this Jesus was not just a political criminal who died saying that I was dying with him and I wasn't, but was actually raised from the dead to show me that God knew him and that God had accepted that as the solution, who is now at the right hand of God to prove to me that he and the Father are together and whatever he says about me is right? And then who, far from condemning me day-by-day, intercedes for us before the Father?"

Now that's the situation, loved ones, with those of us who have accepted that we were crucified with Jesus. Something comes to us to condemn us and we say, "Who will condemn me -- Jesus? But Jesus is the very one who allowed me to die in him. He's the very one who took the worst personality and took it into himself and allowed it to be destroyed in Calvary. He's not the one that's going to come in and condemn me because I've accepted that. That was the only thing God demanded: the destruction of my old selfish, carnal personality. I've accepted that -- I'm allowing God to work it out in me through the Holy Spirit -- he's not going to condemn me for doing what he wanted me to do." And that's really the situation.

Except, some of us here do not answer the question the same way as Paul answered it. When he asked the question, "Who is to condemn" -- we say, "My father, he condemns me. My mother condemns me. My children condemn me. My boss condemns me. My peers condemn me. Everybody is condemning me. They don't just accuse me, they don't criticize me or throw things at me that might be wrong, they actually condemn me. They say that I'm good for nothing, that I'm no kind of a husband, that I'm no kind of a father to anybody's children, that I'm hopeless -- that I shouldn't even be trying to be a typist. They condemn me. They put me down, these people and not only that -- they don't just condemn me in words -- but they have the power to make the condemnation stick because they can fire me. They can cut me out from their circle; they can make me feel lonely. These people condemn me."

Now loved ones, I'd share with you one or two things that you need to look at when you face that, because I don't think there is any of us here that has not faced somebody who was condemning us and was saying we were no good, and we were worthless and useless, and it's important to see some things about it. First of all, they have no power beyond the grave -- they're temporal little creatures themselves -- they may well die before you do. They have no power beyond the grave. They have no power over your eternal destiny. They have no power over those things, so their condemnation is worth as much as it takes to get another job. Their condemnation is really very temporary and

unimportant.

That is what Jesus meant in Matthew 10:28. "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." And really loved ones, there's a limit to the condemnation that people can bring to you. The second thing is this: you may say, "Yes, but they can make my life miserable while they're condemning -- even this side of the grave." That is limited -- even that is limited and is modified by the dear Father who loves you. Even the consequences of their condemnation are not under their control. They are under the modification and the restraining hand of your dear Father. So he has his hand above you and your boss is throwing this firing down upon you, or this father and mother are throwing down this condemnation on you and the Father opens his hands to let just as much down as you can bear. That's it. He just opens his hand and when he sees you're drowning he closes his hand. That's all.

Now, why do I say that? Look at 1 Corinthians 10:13 -- because most of our misery comes by looking at the thing itself and not seeing it from our Father's angle. 1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation," and the Greek word is the same word as for trial, "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength," or he will not let you be tried beyond your strength. "But with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." Loved ones, the Father will not allow anything to come to you that you cannot bear. Some of you say, "Yes, but their condemnation makes me shaky about my own standing before God." Well loved ones, then you have to look clearly at the fact that you've already been condemned; that as far as God is concerned he has damned you to death in Jesus. That's been done once, he's not going to damn you twice. He doesn't kill a person twice for the same life of sin.

And it's important for you, when their condemnation makes you shaky, to look at what has happened in Jesus and see, "Lord, you destroyed me there -- I know you're not interested in destroying me again. And however much these people may make me uncertain of myself, Lord, one thing I'm certain of, you're not a double murderer. You do not kill a person twice. You've destroyed me once in Jesus and that was necessary to transform me into the kind of person that could be used in your family -- but that's once -- and that's all that's needed." It's important, loved ones, to look at what has happened in Jesus.

Now, some of us of course, don't have that problem. We say, "Well brother it's not that others condemn me but, well, I condemn myself -- I condemn myself and I just can't forgive myself. It's not a problem of other people not forgiving me, I just cannot forgive myself. And to tell you the truth I have a poor self image." Now loved ones you better be very straight about all that stuff. First of all, that presupposes that you have the power to condemn yourself; you've the power to damn yourself to death, that's what you're saying. Secondly, it means that you feel you have the power not only to damn yourself to death but you have the power to decide what kind of an image you have -- to decide you can forgive yourself.

Now loved ones, you have not sinned against yourself. You've sinned against God and against other people -- it's not a matter of forgiving yourself -- you can't forgive yourself. And finally, it's kind of an assumption that you can have a good self image apart from God. Now loved ones, none of those things are truth. The truth is that apart from Jesus you're a miserable, self gratifying, self glorifying wretch and that's it. And I don't see how you can have a good self image as a miserable, self gratifying, self glorifying wretch. It's hard to make even that look good and it's kind of dumb to try apart from Jesus -- that's what God says. In fact, God says, "I'm the person

who believes the best. I'm eager to believe the best about you and even I couldn't find anything good about you, I had to destroy you, so don't you start trying to find good things about yourself."

So really, on the whole, all those statements are untrue; you can't condemn yourself even if you tried. You have no power to condemn yourself to death. You can't forgive yourself because it's not yourself you've sinned against, it's God and it's against other people, and really you couldn't possibly have a good image because you're so miserable. So it's important to deal with it at that level. Now, let's see what's behind those things.

"Well, my problem is I condemn myself." Loved ones, do you see that it's sin compounded? It's sin compounded -- "I'm going to live independent of God the Creator of the world, I'm going to do that." That's what sin is. And then "I'm also going to be my own executioner -- I'm not going to let him condemn me or punish me, I'm going to punish myself as well." So you're not only going to be a rebel against God but you're also going to be your own executioner -- you're going to be a rebellious executioner. So deep, deep down it's a desire to punish yourself for your sins. You not only want to sin and be independent of God, but you want to be an independent punisher of those sins. And really, it's a salvation by works kind of game that you're playing, you know.

In fact, at the bottom of it is this: you don't want to accept what God has done to you in Jesus on Calvary. You don't want to allow his death to be made real in your life, but somehow you want to get around the guilt that you're feeling about your sins. So you feel if you can punish them by continually feeling grief or regret or remorse, you'll get some kind of satisfaction that those sins have been dealt with. Yes -- but they've been dealt with in the only way that doesn't matter. The only way they can ever be dealt with is by allowing them to be dealt within Jesus on the cross. Instead of getting up and proudly saying, "I'm going to beat myself for those terrible sins" -- to allow that old self to be crucified with Jesus.

And really, that trick of "I'm condemning myself" is a salvation by works syndrome and it often comes out in, "Well, I don't want to punish myself too much for my gossip." So you begin to punish the person in the next desk for their gossip because you project your gossip into them and then you end up punishing them by criticizing them. No. If you condemn yourself you're involved in wanting to compound the sin that you've already committed by trying to get rid of that sin on your own. You can never do it, loved ones, you can never do it -- it's a refusal to accept what God has done to you in Jesus.

It's a wee bit the same with the business of, "Well, I just can't forgive myself." It's really a feeling inside us that somehow "Oh, I've sinned against myself. I've really hurt myself more than other people." It's really selfishness, "I've been drinking so long that I've done harm to my own body and I just can't forgive myself for that." And the worst thing about your drinking is the sin that is committed against God and against everybody else. But when you say, "I can't forgive myself" you give the impression that it's you, above all, that you've sinned against -- it's not. You're the one that's done the sinning, you're the one that needs the forgiveness and somebody else has to forgive. But underneath there's a failure to see that Jesus' death deals with the problem. There's a feeling that forgiveness is somehow a feeling of sorrow that somebody will show to you, or an overlooking of certain faults that somebody will do to you, or a lowering of certain standards so that they can accept you. So deep down there's a hypocritical attitude, "Well, God may be prepared to lower his standards to forgive me but I'm not going to lower mine. My standards are higher than his and he may manage to lower his but not me. No, I have certain standards that I'll hold onto."

Loved ones. it's Phariseeism, it is -- that business of "I can't forgive myself." The truth is that God forgives you when he restores the relationship between you and him. That's what forgiveness means. Forgiveness doesn't mean, "Oh yeah, okay, alright, let's forget it." That's not forgiveness, that's dumb. You can say that -- lots of people have said that to you -- but the relationship has never been the same, isn't that right? They have said, "Oh yeah, I accept your confession and let's forget it." But you've never had the same relationship with them. Forgiveness is the restoration of relationship. The Father says, "Look, I accept you completely as my own children if you'll just accept what I've done to you in Jesus. I've destroyed you in him. Now, just let me, through the Holy Spirit, make that real in you and you're mine completely. I accept you with all my heart and with no reservations." And that's what real forgiveness is.

And it's the same with the self image thing, you know. Really loved ones, the truth is that God has destroyed that old, self centered being, in Jesus. It's finished with, and now it is Jesus in you. Failure to appreciate the Jesus in you, and to respect the Jesus in you, is reprehensible heresy and blasphemy. So if you have a poor self image of yourself, that's exactly what you should have because God's word says, "There is nothing good in me." Romans 7:18, "There is no good in me" -- so you should have a poor self image of yourself, apart from Jesus. But in Jesus, accepting that all that has been done away with on the cross and that Jesus himself is now in you -- you have the most beautiful Person in the whole universe inside you and you should have nothing but respect, and love, and acceptance for that dear Person. There is just no place for a poor self image if Jesus is in you, because he's the most beautiful person in the whole world.

So loved ones really, that's it. The only thing that is anything near false condemnation in a Christian's life is conviction. The Holy Spirit at times will come down and tell you, "Stop doing what you're doing." But you know the difference between conviction and condemnation. Condemnation is a vague sense that somehow you're being rejected, a general vague sense. Conviction is the Holy Spirit coming down saying, "You talk too loud in class," or, "You talk too much," or, "You criticize." And the moment you stop doing it the conviction lifts. So there is conviction in our Christian life but who is to condemn?

No one can condemn because it is the judge himself that has died -- yes, he's been raised from the death -- who sits at God's right hand, who day-by-day intercedes for you and me. So who is there to condemn when the judge himself is pleading on our behalf and his Father agrees with what has happened and shows that by raising him from the dead? So loved ones, will you ask God to show you where you're under some of those deceptions. Especially, some of you under that old self image thing; it's not fair and it's not right, and true, and honest. Or the, "I cannot forgive myself thing," or, "I condemn myself" -- get yourself out of the picture -- God has already condemned you, accept that and go on from there. And that's what the Father wants from you today. So I pray that anybody who's under it will look at what God has done to you in Jesus. That's all that was required and that's all you need.

Let us pray. Dear Father, we would pray for each other now this morning because we know, Lord, that any man can speak words but it takes your Holy Spirit to wing them to our hearts. So Father we pray for the loved ones beside us -- pray Lord that if they are under any kind of false condemnation you will show them, our Father, what you did to them in Jesus. That's all you need, that's all you're satisfied to do and that's all they need. Father, give them grace to accept that and to allow you, now, to take them on from that place by making that death and resurrection real in them through the power of the Holy Spirit. We ask this in Jesus' name. And 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 forever more.

Amen.