

God's Will in God's Way

Romans 12:2j

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

Because it is graduation time, many of us are trying to settle the question of what we will do with our lives. Thousands throughout the United States are preoccupied with that. "What am I going to do with my life?" But many of us have been preoccupied with that question for much longer. We drift along from job to job, location to location, community to community, and have never managed to settle what we think we were put here to do. Those of us who believe that the Creator is personal do believe that he put us here to do something. We believe that a God who arranges for plants to absorb sunlight by such a complex system as photosynthesis certainly has thought before he put the most complex invention he ever made here on earth. You and I believe that this God of ours had something in mind when he put us here. That is the real answer to the question "What am I going to do with my life?" isn't it?

You are going to do what the Creator put you here to do. He obviously knows why he put you here. Yet, you and I throw up our hands and say, "Yes, but that is begging the question. That is exactly our problem. We don't know how to find out why the Creator put us here. We know he didn't just throw us down here to make our own way. We know he had a definite plan in mind when he set us on this earth, but we don't know how to find out why he put us here and what he put us here to do."

How do you find God's particular will for your own life? The reason we have difficulty is not due to God. Think of it for a moment. If you were God and you thought up this whole universe and then out of the genius of your own mind created people as complex as us and put us here on earth for definite purposes, you know you wouldn't then refuse to tell us why you put us here. God doesn't either. God doesn't play hide-and-seek with us. The God who said, "He that seeks me with all his heart will surely find me" doesn't play games with us. Yet, we pretend that we are trying to find out why he put us here but he won't tell us. We fall into all kinds of contortions to try to get him to tell us. Doesn't it stand to reason that he isn't reluctant to tell us, and there is some other reason why we don't have ears to hear him or eyes to see?

Loved ones, the reason is simply that you and I are not doing the things that he has already told us plainly he wants us to do. The reason we can't hear him or why his voice does not manifest itself within us through our natural inclinations so that we find our niche in the world, is that we don't do the things that he has told us plainly he wants all of us to do. Because we don't do that, we are not in tune to hear him give us the "big directions", as we call them, for our lives. In other words, we are really like a bunch of silly little kids whose God has told them, "Go into the garden," and we say, "Then what will we do?" He says, "Go into the garden," and we say, "What will we do after we get into the garden?", and he says, "You will find out when you go into the garden." We all sit around in the living room and say, "I wonder what he wants us to do." Then one of us sets up as a vocational guidance counsellor and we go to him and say, "What do you think we should do?" We fret and are anxious about what we are going to do with our lives, because we won't do the things that God has told us plainly we are to do in this life.

Now some of us think we have done that. There are many of us who think: Jesus has died so that God could forgive us our independence of him and for the things we have committed against him. As a result of that we have given our lives to Jesus in gratitude. We have taken the first step in doing

what he told us to do, which in Romans 12:2 is to do good--to live a good life, to do things that are honest and kind, to avoid fornication, to avoid dishonesty, to avoid lies. We have cleaned up our outward lives and we say, "We are doing what God told us to do," but we haven't taken the second step. The verse says, "that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good...." Then in the RSV it says, "what is acceptable," but the Greek means "what is pleasing to God," and we haven't taken that second step. Inside in our own hearts we have not begun to touch what pleases God. Outwardly we are what he wants us to be, but inwardly we are just the same people we always were.

Loved ones, the fact is, the most important thing to any father is not what the son or daughter will do. He appears to be interested in that at certain times around examination time and graduation time, but really what is most in his heart is what kind of person his son or daughter is going to be. Most parents are primarily concerned about what the character of their children is going to be like. Because they know if that is right, whatever they do, they will be all right. Now that is much truer with our Father in heaven, because he made us to be with him forever, and so he is concerned about the kind of people we are, because he is going to live with us forever. It is going to be hell on earth or hell in heaven for him if we are not the kind of people that are at peace and in harmony with him.

So our God is more concerned about the inward life of our hearts, because that is what determines whether you can live with a person for a long time or not. You know certain people that if you thought you were going to be locked in a room with them for twenty years, you would immediately bail out. And yet there are other people that would be just great. Some people work right together; you are at ease when you are in their company; there is no strain, just peace. You don't have to be doing things together, it is just good to be together. That is what God is after. God's will for each of us is not just that we do the outward things that are right or avoid the things that are wrong, but that we would actually be like him inside, in our heart of hearts. That's what he wants. Until we come to that position inside, we will never be able to be sure what God wants us to do in our lives.

This is what Jesus was getting at in the lesson. Maybe you would look at it if you can bear it again. It was Jesus going straight for those dear old Pharisees, and I say "dear old," because such too often are we, so we kind of have a vested interest in these fellows. Matthew 23:25: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and of the plate, that the outside also may be clean. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

That is what God is getting at for you and me. We outwardly appear righteous to men, but within we are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. In other words, many of us do nice things and good things, and we probably avoid the terrible things--the great crimes or the great sins, the great immoralities--but we have difficulty knowing what God wants us to do with our lives, because we haven't moved into this inner realm. Outwardly we are conformed to the image of a child of God; inwardly we are conformed to the image of Satan. In other words, inside we are ravenous wolves. Outwardly we are smiles and love and friendliness, but inwardly we are ravenous wolves, often eating each other up. If you say, "You mean we are thinking bad thoughts of each other or we are being critical in our language of each other?" No, but out from us go critical attitudes to each other; out from us go judgmental thoughts.

A lot of us here labor under terrible inferiority complexes; we feel so inadequate. We wonder where that comes from. Don't you see where it comes from? It comes from all of us who have critical attitudes to each other, who are judgmental without ever saying it. "The skirt looks okay, but look at the shoes!" "He spoke all right, but did you see his hair?" That is it and a lot of other things far worse. Our hearts are not clean hearts. We walk on and it is as if everybody is shooting darts at us. We are blocked ourselves, because we think nobody knows. "That was a little critical thought, but that is just what human beings are like. We all have critical thoughts. It was a little judgmental, but we have to judge, don't we?"

We run around excusing and rationalizing the evil in our hearts towards each other, and we don't realize that we may as well lift heavy V8 engine blocks and set them on top of each other's shoulders. There is a whole invisible psychic world but there is also a whole invisible spiritual world that binds us all together here. If you think a judgmental thought about one of us, that puts a burden upon us. Worst of all, it puts a burden on the Christ who died to change that heart of yours completely. We are like ravenous wolves and whitewashed tombs. Often we are smiling and happy, and it is as if we all went to "smiling school" or we all went to "how-to-be-genial school". We all know how to be nice to each other on the outside; we are whitewashed tombs on the outside, and inside there is gloomy deadness and emptiness.

The tragedy is that many of us think that is the way life is. It isn't. That is not the way God wants life to be. You and I make our mistake, not because we have that inside us, but because we think that that has to continue. We don't realize that God has done something on Calvary that deals with that, and the evil heart inside us can be changed if we will once decide that this is not the way things are meant to be. But you see what we do? A judgmental thought comes into our heart or head and we abide it. That is what we do wrong--we abide it; we let it stay there. We don't treat it as an enemy -- we treat it as a normal natural part of us. We have a natural critical attitude to each other, and we never get down to the bottom of it and see it as a self-defensive thing trying to destroy everybody else in the world to make us feel secure.

There is another way to security. Loved ones, don't put up with those things. First, see that our hearts are not to be like that. That is why we have trouble with a certain preposition in the Greek Testament. I'll show you the two verses and the preposition. Romans 5:1 is the great basis for most of our relationship with God, those of us who believe we are his children. "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The preposition "with" is the one we are okay about. Probably the great majority of us have peace with God. We believe God is our Father because Jesus died for us, we believe God loves us; we believe we have been restored to the favor of God -- so, we have peace with God. The preposition we have trouble with is in Philippians 4:7: "And the peace of God, which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." The preposition is "peace OF God." Many of us here would say, "We have peace WITH God but I don't always take tranquilizers, I don't always smoke, but I don't always have the peace OF God."

The reason we don't is we have not allowed God to do the same work in our inner self that we have allowed him to do in our outward lives. We have not allowed him to come in and probe with his fingers every little resentment, every little critical attitude and every little moment of uncleanness. We have not allowed him to clean our hearts of these things. The result is we lack the peace of God and we cannot obey that verse before Philippians 4:7. Verse 6, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made

known to God." We do have trouble and anxiety.

We have trouble and anxiety about our jobs, our finances, our families, our futures -- about all kinds of things; and yet we take it for granted that that is normal. Everybody moves through life with wrinkled foreheads and hearts that aren't light. "That is what life is about; you just bear these things." Loved ones, the command of God is plain--have no anxiety. But we continue to allow that to dwell in our hearts. Do you know what God wants? He wants you to look into that anxiety or worry and see why it is there.

Do you know why it is there? Whether it is worry about who you are going to marry or anxiety about money or concern about the family relationships, do you know why it is there? Because God is God of your outward life but you are god of your inward life. You operate in your heart, your thoughts, your feelings, your attitudes, your motives and your reactions as god. From that secret castle of yours, you feel responsible for controlling your future, you feel responsible for controlling your finances, and you feel that you have a right to control what you are going to do next month, what you are going to do next year. You feel you have a right to control how people respond to you. That is why you exercise resentment against them. You feel with your resentment you should be able to punish them. With your resentment you should be able to not only to judge a person but to punish them. You feel you should be able to determine what is to happen to your future.

You take the cars that God has given you and the houses and clothes he has given you as your own, instead of as things that still belong to the great God of the universe. It is quite nice to rent a car when you go on vacation, because then when you hear the knock in it, thank goodness it is not yours. They will take care of it, and you just check in with Hertz and they give you another one. It is so nice to be in that position where you are just hiring or renting it. It is such a burden when you own it. That is why we have such anxiety in our hearts.

We have given our outer lives to God and said, "God, you are in charge of the stars. I can't do a thing. I've stared at that star for about three hours now, and I can't get it to move. You are in charge of the Mississippi River. I've bailed buckets out of it and I can't change the course of it. All right, you are in charge of the Mississippi River. You are in charge of politics; you are in charge of the nations; you are in charge of the wind and all those big things. Lord God, you are in charge of some of the outward things, because my friends wouldn't respect me if I were sleeping around all the time. My colleagues wouldn't have me as a friend if I was not a moral person. The people in church wouldn't have anything to do with me if I didn't do the things that they all do. So God, to some extent, you are in charge of my outward life, but in my heart I am king, and I will do what I want. I will think what thoughts I want, and I will let the refuse and garbage of the gutter move through my mind day in and day out because that is my right as a red-blooded human being."

Loved ones, that is why we have trouble. That is why we get so anxious and fretful about things. We insist they must turn out the way we want them to turn out. Do you know you can't? Don't you have enough examples in your own life of things happening in your families, in your private life, in your professional life, in your financial life that prove to you that you can't? With all your exertion you cannot make things go the way you want them to go. All the Father is saying to you, "Will you let me be God, inside, in the deepest part of your heart? When you sense a critical attitude coming up to somebody else, will you reject that as not my will? Will you ask me to show you why you have that critical attitude? Will you trust me to protect you from those people? They may appear to be destroying you utterly, but trust me to protect you. Let me call 'uncle'; don't you call it. In other words, let me be God of your inward reactions and responses."

Loved ones, that is the key. Our tragedy is that we do not live I Corinthians 6:19: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price." You and I are saying in our hearts, "We are our own; we are not bought with a price. Stay off, Lord Jesus. Our hearts are our own; we have a right to our own thoughts." Loved ones, you are not your own. You were bought with a price. Your heart does not belong to you. You are not free to do what you want with it. Thank God you're not! Do you see what a garbage heap we make of it? You are not free to do what you want with it.

If you believe that Jesus died for you, he died for all of you, your inner heart as well, and you are duty bound to say, "Lord Jesus, this is your heart and I have no right but to reject that thought or feeling at the door before it gets in." The error we make is we are trying to keep God as God in our outward life and we are not letting him be God in our inner lives, because that way we can continue to do what we want. C.S. Lewis' dog never quite obeyed, he says it sometimes agreed with you. That is it. We are prepared to put up with outward things. Actually, fornication and adultery aren't good for life anyway, and it certainly isn't good for our social relationships, so we will stay away from them, but inwardly we want to be free to think what we want to think, to entertain what feelings or attitudes we want to entertain. That's it!

It is what Martin Luther said in that hymn, "One little word will fell him." One little word will fell Satan, one little word will stop that jungle developing in your heart, and that little word is "no". "Lord Jesus, you died for me, you alone are God, and you have bought this heart of mine. Savior, this is yours." The moment you put your foot into the Red Sea, the resources and power of the universe are made available, and the waters move back and thousands of people are able to move through on dry land. All a person has to do to set loose the power of Calvary in their hearts is to bend in the right direction the first moment they are aware of evil inside.

All you and I have to do is to decide that this is a subnormal life. It is a life of critical attitudes, a life of worry and anxiety, a life of fretting, and a life where our hearts are not at ease with God, a life where we are not relaxed and free. That is subnormal life. You have no idea how your life will be freed and liberated if you will stop doing the task for which you are not ideally fitted--that is of being God. You are not ideally fitted to be God because, for one thing, you haven't God's abilities. You haven't his resources. That is part of the frustration and the anxiety. You are trying to make the things happen, and you haven't God's power and resources. The only thing is to obey your God in your inner heart -- stop trying to manipulate -- stop trying to say, "Well, Pastor, I like to fiddle around with this thought and that person in the office, I can't avoid resentment towards them."

Loved ones, if you take that attitude, your heart will continue to be a garbage heap, and then it will spread out into your outward life. Most of all, you will be such an inner hell that you will not be at home in heaven. That is how we get to hell and heaven. God won't need to do much dividing; we will divide ourselves. We will go to the place we are most at home in. Where people are jealous of each other, backbiting and critical of each other, speaking behind the hand about each other, are resentful towards each other, filled with fretfulness and anxiety about what is going to happen -- if we live that way in this life, that is the people we will be at home with, and we will live like that in eternal destruction of each other forever. That is not meant to be. Your dear heart can be clean and pure, and you can live free from fretfulness and worry and trying to control everybody else's life and from trying to control your own.

There is really only one way to let God be God, and that is to regard your own life as no longer in existence. You may say, "Oh, no, Pastor, can't you regard yourself as alive and give what is due to yourself and what is due to God?" No. You end up giving everything to yourself. That is why God said it plainly, "For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God." [Colossians 3:3] When Christ appears you also will appear with him in glory. That will be your big moment. Until then you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. Regard yourself in that way, treat the thoughts and worries and wonderings in your own heart like that, treat yourself as crucified with Christ and this is a life that God can do what he wants to with, and your life bursts into freedom. You will be amazed. You will be like little four year old children--free and light in your hearts. We are meant to be free from circumstances and critical thoughts.

Our little dog had congestive heart failure and he didn't realize there was anything wrong with him at all. He didn't realize that as we were feeding the digitalis it wouldn't be long before he died, so every time he went out into the garden he enjoyed it. He enjoyed each day as it came, because for him the circumstances of having to cough after he ran around a little didn't have a whole lot of emotional messages or fretful anxiety, because he couldn't control his own little life. That is what it means. At last you are free to live a day at a time. It means a circumstance occurs either physically in your life or a circumstance occurs financially in your life, or this unfortunate circumstance occurs matrimonially in your life -- forget it. You don't think of it at all. It is as if that never took place. We live in this present moment, because that life was crucified with Christ. "Here I am, Lord; this is what you wanted me to face; I face it." We go joyously from day to day receiving your daily bread as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, not all concerned with whether we will have manna for next month or the following year. Not all concerned with whether we have stored up enough stuff to barter for something else with it. But we are content with the daily bread that God has given us today to live as free people.

Loved ones, you can. The first step is to look into that dear heart of yours and see that that belongs to God. God is the God of your heart, and your life has been crucified with Christ. You have died and your life is hid with him. It may amount to something and it may amount to nothing, but when he appears in glory you will appear with him. Until then you enjoy the journey, you enjoy the trip. He has planned the tour. He has the map and he knows where you are going, He will make sure you get there. You just enjoy the ride. Stop trying to be God of your life and everybody else's until eventually you can't stop. Eventually you either become a Hitler, or worse, you want to be a Hitler, but you live under the constant frustration that you are not.

That is why it is either God is God or you are god. That means either God is the only one you ever think of or you are the only one you ever think of. It means God is alive or you are alive; God is dead or you are dead. You will be amazed at the peace that comes if you do accept that you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. Accept you are not your own and you have been bought with a price. I pray especially for you dear hearts that have been troubled and burdened and allowed all kinds of dirt, filth and judgmental and critical attitudes to dwell in your hearts that you will see it is far better not to get anywhere near the mud than to try to tiptoe through it without getting dirty. It is far better to have nothing to do with critical attitudes, resentments or worry. I'm not worrying because you have commanded me not to worry, not because I know how things are going to go but because you have commanded me. I pray that you will come into that freedom. I pray that you will have clean hearts, which is what God wants for us here and in eternity.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we do begin to glimpse that we are trying to do it the hard way. We are trying to live outward lives that look Christian and live inward lives that are hell on earth. Lord, we see that you are not interested in the outward show at all. You are interested like any dear father is, most of all, in the kind of people we are in the inside where nobody sees us. You see what we are when we are alone that is what we are.

Dear Father, we see that. We see the ridiculous burden we are placing on each other by these thoughts and feelings which we think does no one any harm. We see the fretful anxiety we are bringing into our lives. We see, Father, that we can't possibly hear what you want to do with our lives. That is because we are so disobedient inside in our hearts.

Lord, we ask you now to begin to show us those unseen, inward sins that no one else knows about. Enable us to label them sin and to stop labeling them ourselves as not part of us. Help us to see that they are the part of self that you separated from us in your son, Jesus, on Calvary. So Lord, we see that it is your will that we have no truck with anger of any kind. When we allow it to dwell there, we make it more difficult for ourselves than need be. When we allow jealousy to occur for a moment, we are refusing to accept that we are not our own.

Lord, we ask you to show us those attitudes in us that we have got used to. Father, we intend to turn them out. We know we can't do it ourselves but we know if we begin to turn them out, your power and resources will align themselves with our will and you will cleanse our hearts by faith.

Dear Father, we would pray that for each other today. So that each one of us may live lives of joy and delight with everything released into our Father's arms. Lord, if you want us to succeed, good or if you want us to fail, good -- if you want us to be rich, good or if you want us to be poor, good but Lord we are going to come into a place where we are at ease on the cross with Jesus. Not eternally shifting our position to get more comfortable but resting where you have placed us. Father, we start today by each one thanking you for our present circumstances. We thank you, Father. We thank you Lord God for these circumstances which we find ourselves for they are your will for us in Christ Jesus. So we rest our case before you. Thank you, Lord, for your dear word and most of all for Jesus who took us to death with himself and recreated us like himself -- free and child like in his trust and love.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us today and throughout this week.