

Accepting One Another

Romans 15:07b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Have you felt at all what I think some of us are beginning to feel in these days -- that the society is getting so coarse and crude that it's beginning to get a little difficult to remember even what should be your attitude to certain things?

I didn't think that it would come so quickly but don't you think it's beginning to get to that point that the whole society is getting so coarse and crude that you begin to lose touch with the things that actually your fathers, mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers taught you.

We always said that this would come about but I think a number of us are surprised at how fast it's happening now. So it does seem vital, loved ones, to stay close with this dear book [the Bible] and that's one of the reasons I'd ask you to get back with me to our study of Romans which has been proceeding for over a decade and it's Romans 15. It just is refreshing and good to see the way the things are meant to be and the way they can be in our own lives. So it's Romans 15:7.

Romans 15:7-8, "Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I tell you the Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs." You may remember that we have dealt with that Romans 15:7 before.

"Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." And you remember one of the translations says, "Accept one another." So what we've been studying is Jesus' attitude to people and about our attitude to each other. You may remember one of the instances was the time when some Pharisees actually caught a woman in the act of adultery.

Now, where they were when they caught the woman in the act of adultery, one hesitates to think. But they apparently caught this woman in the very act of adultery and brought her before Jesus, this man who was praising purity and obedience. Then you remember what happened. It's in John 8:3.

John 8:3, "The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst, they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?' This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, 'Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.' And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again.'"

Now why? Why did he not condemn her? Would you say because he condoned her sin? No, because he gives her a command that is even stronger than many of us would dream of giving. He said, "Go, and do not sin again. Don't sin again. Never commit adultery again. Never sin again."

There's a great belief today that you have to sin a little -- there's no way of getting out of a little sin. Jesus said, "Don't sin again," so he didn't condone her sin. So it wasn't because he was easy on sin, loved ones.

Well, why did he not condemn her? Because the only condemning you and I are able to do is, "Tsk, tsk, tsk...what a terrible thing to be caught doing." That's it. That's the only condemning we human beings can do. "Tsk, tsk, tsk... what a dreadful thing to be caught doing," with emphasis on the "caught" usually.

But the only condemning that you and I can do is kind of putting a person down. It is, it is, loved ones. You'll see as we go through the study, it is. I know we have all high and holy thoughts about it but finally the only condemning that human beings can do to other human beings is, "Tsk, tsk, tsk... what a terrible thing to be caught doing." The tragedy of that is that it actually condemns us ourselves. I'll show you where it says that.

Romans 2:1, "Therefore you have no excuse, O man, whoever you are, when you judge another; for in passing judgment upon him you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. We know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who do such things." That's why.

When you condemn somebody else for doing something, you're only bringing more guilt on yourself because the Bible says, "You yourself are doing the same things in some way in your life." Loved ones, you know it yourself. It's obvious, in some things that we just project our own problems on to other people and we beat them to death in the other person.

We can recognize some of those things but the tragedy is there are many things like that that you don't recognize; that you are, in a subtle way, doing the same thing with. And God's word says, "Every time you condemn somebody else", (condemn means put them down), every time you say, "That's wrong and you're going to hell for that," that's what condemning means, here in amongst human beings.

Every time you say that, you are bringing guilt upon yourself because you are doing the same thing or worse in your own present life. Actually you're compounding your own sin because you're setting yourself up as God, who is absolutely pure and perfect. You aren't that and yet you're condemning somebody and showing that you yourself are aware too that that kind of thing is wrong.

Indeed, there's only one condemning that achieves anything. I'll show you that condemning. It's Romans 8:3, and loved ones, this is the key to the whole study this morning.

Romans 8:3, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh." Here's what it means. God took that lady with her lust -- though we assume it's lust, who knows why she committed adultery -- but God took that lady with the lust in her heart and with a body that maybe had become used to that kind of promiscuity. He put that body and that old lustful heart into his Son Jesus and condemned it to death. That is, he didn't say, "You bad, bad adulteress, how bad can you be? You're terrible. You're dreadful." You shouldn't condemn that way, which is useless. It's just verbal whipping. It doesn't do any good.

He did the only condemning that does any good. He took the lust of her heart and her old body that

was used to the promiscuity and he put it into his Son Jesus, and he condemned it, [damno, damnerie, Latin for condemn] he destroyed it. He destroyed its power over her. He destroyed it in his Son Jesus. That's the only condemning that means two bits to anybody here in this room. It is.

It's no use you looking at some of the rest of us and saying, "Tsk, tsk, tsk... how dreadfully lustful you are. How terribly irritable you are. How terribly critical you are." It does no good. We need to be delivered from our lust. We need to be delivered from our criticism. Do something for us. Help us. Destroy us and make us over again. Do something to help us. Stop looking down upon us. That's what we're crying out, that's what the world is crying out.

That's why Jesus did not condemn the woman-- because he knew the only condemning that would do any good had already been done by his Father in his death on Calvary and that that woman's lust and that woman's desire for her own pleasure had been destroyed in him on Calvary and that was all that was needed except for her to believe that.

Now why is it always wrong to condemn a person? Because you make it more difficult for them to believe that that has been dealt with in Christ on Calvary. That's it. You make it more difficult for them to take the only step that is able to deliver them -- that step of faith that they have been delivered. They have been destroyed in Christ on Calvary; they have been made completely new. And they can get up and their Father will accept them and they can just walk away from their sin, that's what they most need.

When you keep condemning them and pointing out what's wrong, the only thing you can do is convince them that that sin is un-crucified. Have you ever thought of that? You are not able to reveal to them sin crucified, do you see that? You're not. You're not. I mean you may say, "Oh yes, I am. I can sidle up to them and say, 'Well, you're pretty wretched and pretty rotten and pretty miserable but you know that's all crucified with Christ, so you're okay.'"

Well, it doesn't come home to them, the wee souls. They say, "If you really believe that, you would see me as I am in Christ. You would see me whole and complete and your faith would raise and stir my faith and I would grab hold of it and I'd walk away from this sin." That's it.

What we most need is somebody not to believe in us that we're hardly worth believing in, we're such a mess. But somebody to believe in us crucified and made completely new in Jesus, that's what's needed. And every time you draw attention to a person's failing or a person's fault or a person's sin, all you can do is draw attention to un-crucified sin. That's the very nature of the beast. That's the very essence of your attitude to them.

When they're aware of your condemnation, you understand, loved ones, it doesn't have to be verbal, I mean the condemnation doesn't have to be verbal, we all know that. They just know that you look askance at them. They just know that you look a little down on them. They just know you criticize them. They just know it. They just know there's a critical attitude in your heart to them. And they know it. It's strange but there's something inside them that lets them know that you don't really believe that they have been changed in Jesus, because actually they know full well.

If you knew they had been changed in Jesus, you would be condemning a shadow and who would condemn a shadow? Do you see we all know this, and we have it built into us, loved ones? That's the strange thing. It doesn't matter whether it was Hitler. It doesn't matter whether it was the latest murderer in New York City; we all have this built into us. We know whether you believe that we have been

changed and made completely new or whether you don't.

That's why it is a blasphemy against God and it is a service to Satan when you condemn another human being because of what they are and because of what they do. That's right. It is a service to Satan and it is a blasphemy against God. It is making Christ's death vain. It is, loved ones.

It's making Christ's death vain when you treat another person as not having been crucified, destroyed and buried and raised up new with Christ. It's making Christ's death vain. It's blaspheming God and it's serving Satan.

I'll tell you Satan's only job in this world. His job is to sidle up to human beings and say, "You have no chance of getting into heaven. You are not like God. You will never be like God. You are hopelessly lost and you will never get into heaven and anything that Jesus has done has not been done for you." That's it. In other words, you side with the great enemy of God. Look at it, loved ones, in Revelation 12:10.

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.'" That's all you do. You just accuse people.

You see I know what we all say. We all say, "No, no, we're not accusing them," but do you see that that's what you're doing. If Christ has died for all and all have died, then that person has been made new in Christ. And all you're doing is accusing them wrongly, because they actually have been crucified in Christ and that's why God allows them to live today. Why do you not think God flooded us all out with another flood? Why does he allow people to continue to be alive? Because he has crucified them in Christ and the moment they believe that, they are changed.

So, if you condemn a person, you're not even condemning something that is there to be condemned. You're simply accusing them. You're saying they're wrong. Loved ones, it's always wrong to do it. It is. Now, I know what you'll say. "Brother, who will tell them? Who will tell them that they're wrong? Who will tell them that they've sinned? Who will reveal to them sin crucified? Who will reveal to them sin forgiven? You say, "I can't." All right, who will reveal to them sin forgiven? Who will reveal to them that they've been crucified with Christ?"

One, not even the Son, not even the Father, just one. Just one person in the whole universe has that responsibility. Not the Father, not the Son, not you and not me, just one Person loved ones. If you look at John 16:7, you'll see.

John 16:7, "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you." [Counselor is the Holy Spirit] "But if I go, I will send him to you and when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." You remember there's another translation that says, "When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of sin."

The Holy Spirit -- he will convict your friend, my relative, you and me. He will convict us of sin and he will convict us of sin in such a way that we will see ourselves crucified with Christ and made completely new. It will come not as accusation but as life-giving conviction. Our place is the same attitude as Jesus, to accept one another as being crucified in Christ and to help each other to

see that.

I remember what the biggest problem was for my brother when we were young. He is two years younger than me. A man who worked with my dad used to say a certain man had two sons because it was the prodigal son story. I was the good guy. I was the guy with the white hat and therefore, of course, the worst one, really. But on the surface I was a good guy and he was a bad guy and I was the bright guy and he wasn't the bright guy; that whole mess that I had enough problems to deal with later on when I thought I was something but what happened was the usual thing.

I went through school first in Belfast and the poor, younger brother comes behind and Ernest always did this right and did that right. The poor guy comes in and hears, "Why can't you be like your brother?" That was the hardest thing. We're all in that.

Most of us don't need to be convinced that we're sinful or convinced that we're bad but we have an impossible time believing that we have been crucified with Christ and made whole and that God accepts us and loves us and looks upon us as he looks upon his own Son, that's the hard thing for us. If anybody can help us with that, that would be great. That would build up our faith.

Who will convict the world of sin? It is the Holy Spirit. Now, I'd like to blow the whole thing out of the water by contradicting it all. It's vital. If you'd like to look at it, 1 Corinthians 5:1 and you can see it plainly without me explaining that, just as we read it.

First Corinthians 5:1, "It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and of a kind that is not found even among pagans; for a man is living with his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit, and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Now that seems just to contradict all that we've been saying. Here is Paul saying, "I am present with you and I am pronouncing judgment on this man and not only that, you're to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh." Now surely if that's condemnation, that's condemnation of an extreme kind and surely that is one of God's apostles pronouncing judgment on a person.

Do you see it's vital to remember what we shared some weeks ago, that there is responsibility for the external order of the world laid upon judges, upon policemen, upon teachers, upon fathers, upon heads of families, and that external order of the world is preserved by the rule of law, so that if a son does something that is contemptuous of his mother, the father has a responsibility to step in there and to rebuke him and reprove him and so, there is an administration of law that is for the external order of society that must continue.

So the elders of a church have to discipline a church member who is involved in outward immorality or immorality that is of such an obvious kind that he or she is doing despite the witness of God's Spirit. That's presumably what they did. They disciplined the man. They actually expelled them from the church so that he would sue for forgiveness to God and he would be delivered from Satan, as he realized how serious his position was.

And we all have those responsibilities, loved ones. What we've said earlier this morning does not

cut across our responsibilities as fathers, mothers, teachers, as administrators, as law enforcement officers, as judges. There is a right execution and administration of law that we ought to undertake.

What Jesus is talking about is the judgmental attitude. That's it. Jesus is talking about the realm of personal relationships where we do not have a responsibility to a child as his father, where we do not have a responsibility to an employee as their employer, where we do not have responsibility to a subordinate as their boss, where we do not have responsibility as a policeman to a culprit.

He's talking about personal relationships, where we take attitudes to each other that are condemning and that are judgmental and that build walls between us and build up our self-righteousness as we find ourselves able to poke holes in other people's lives.

In other words, Jesus is talking about the things that destroy our relationships, really. He is talking about the things that destroy our marriages and destroy our personal friendships and destroy our intra-personal dealings with one another.

He is saying, "In that situation, your heart must be absolutely clean of any judging of the other person, of any pointing out to the other person where they're wrong." If you're a policeman, if you're a teacher, if you're a father, if you're a mother, if you're a boss, if you're in relationship with the external order of society that requires you to administer a rebuke or a reproof, then be sure that you administer it with a clean heart that has no judgmental attitude in it or no feeling that the other person is worse than you are. Administer it with a cool and a calm and a clean heart, seeing the person as absolutely, completely changed in Jesus and made new.

But then he is saying to us in our own personal relationships, there is no place for regarding each other as sinful but see each other as crucified with Christ and as made whole. The Holy Spirit, he will convince them quickly enough of their sin. What you need to do is convince them of their acceptance by God in Jesus.

In other words, these are saving days. These aren't condemning days. We have just a short respite here on earth to convince as many of us as possible that we've been utterly changed in Jesus. We have just a short respite, just a short 70 years, most of us much less than that now. We have just a little time. These are saving days. These are days to convince each other that we've been crucified in Christ and made completely whole and new. These are not condemning days.

There will be condemning days. There will be a day that has been fixed by God. He has fixed the day on which he will judge the world by a man whom he has appointed. And, of this, he has given assurance to all men by raising that man from the dead.

There'll be a time when we will all face Jesus as the great judge of the entire universe, but until that time, loved ones, these are saving days. Our task is to see each other in Jesus completely new and completely made whole and to have not a taint of condemnation to each other's attitude to see.

Now, apart from anything else, believe me, it makes the world a clean place to live in. I don't know if you've thought about the people who say, "Oh the world is so terrible. It's a terrible world. It's just bearing down upon me." We're not meant to live like that.

We're meant to see the world whole and crucified and raised in Jesus. We're not meant to be burdened

down in that sense with other people's sin. That world has been crucified with Christ. We're meant to walk joyfully through it. We're meant to see people through rose tinted spectacles.

Not if you're a policeman, I agree with you. A policeman has to arrest a culprit. Not if you are a father. If you are a father, you have to reprove a child. Not if you are a teacher, you have to keep order in your classroom, but in your personal attitude to all those people and to all the rest of us, you've to have rose-tinted spectacles. Why? Do you say to me, so that you won't be able to see reality? No.

Reality is rose-tinted with the blood of Jesus. Reality is rose-tinted with the precious blood of Jesus. Reality is that Christ has died for all, therefore all have died. Reality is that the world has been crucified with Christ. Reality is seeing things as completely redeemed in Jesus and we have 70 years to stir each other's faith to believe that and then if we don't believe it after that, then the condemnation comes and is manifested.

How far do you go in that? I mean, let's face it, how far do you keep on with that? Because you and I know that human nature can persist in persevering sin for a long time. Loved ones, you keep on as long as is needed to convince that person that they've been crucified with Christ. You keep on loving each other. You keep on bearing with each other's sin, as long as it's necessary to convince the other person that they've been made whole in Jesus.

I don't know if you know any saintly grandmothers, saintly grandfathers. I know there are lots of nice grandmothers but if you have ever known any saintly grandmother or saintly grandfather or any saintly old man in some church, you know the amazing part about them. They can meet the most wretched, miserable, sinful guy or girl in the family, or the worst scoundrel in the church who has come back from all kinds of wastage of his life and that old saint looks at them with the same love that he looks at the dearest friend he has.

Sometimes, in fact, you would like to shake him. You'd like to tell him, "Listen, let me tell you some of the things this guy has been doing." But those old saintly people, it's as if they see right through all of that and they see that all were crucified with Christ and they have the love of God for that person.

Now, let me ask you, when that old saint dies, have you been around those scoundrels at the time of his death? Have you ever talked with them about that old saint, and if you have, you know the story. "That was a godly man if ever there was one. I got more from God through that man than anybody else. That was somebody that believed in me when nobody else believed." That's it. That's what this is about.

How long do you keep on doing it? Until eternity begins. As long as is needed to get the other person to see that they've been crucified with Christ. In other words, God calls us to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us for the glory of God and to do it as long as we have to do it because that is the only thing that will save. That's the only thing that will save. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we come before you for each other this morning and Lord, we come before you in regard to our own attitude to each other. Father, we see either Jesus has been crucified and we've all been crucified with him or he hasn't been and we haven't been. Father, if he has and if we've been crucified with him, then there's no point in us poking our little fingers into corpses. There's no point in us condemning sin that has already been effectively condemned to death and has been brought

into non-existence.

So Father, we look up to you this morning and we repent of this attitude that we've had. We change our whole mind and our whole way of thinking. Lord, while we lift up our responsibilities for the external order of society and our functions, yet Father as far as our hearts are concerned, we now commit ourselves to looking upon each other as people who have been crucified in Christ, raised up and made whole.

We commit to you, dear Holy Spirit, the task of making that real to our friends and our relatives. Meanwhile, we undertake our responsibility of loving them and welcoming them and accepting them as Christ has loved and welcomed and accepted us. We do this in the name of him who has borne the pain of the death and the condemnation, even Jesus, our Savior.

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 evermore. Amen.