

# Romans 9:16 the Divine Part & the Human Part

by Ernest O'Neill

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*The sermon explores the balance between God's mercy and human will in the process of salvation, emphasizing the necessity of true spiritual transformation through the Holy Spirit.*

**Scripture:** John 3:36, Romans 5:8, Romans 6:5, Romans 9:16, 1 Corinthians 15:45, 2 Corinthians 5:19, James 2:19, 1 John 3:10

**Topics:** "Salvation By Faith", "Spiritual Regeneration"

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## Description

Ernest O'Neill discusses the misconception that salvation is solely based on believing in God's grace without any effort on our part, emphasizing the importance of understanding the role of man's will in accepting God's mercy. He delves into Romans 9:16, highlighting God's initiative in salvation and the need for us to willingly participate in the process of spiritual regeneration. O'Neill contrasts the popular cerebral faith with the genuine spiritual transformation that involves surrendering our wills to God's work in our lives, ultimately leading to a real relationship with our Creator.

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## Transcript

### INTRODUCTION

1. I think there are many of us here who want to have a real relationship with God and people tell us all we have to do is "believe"-- so we kind of gulp in breath, screw up our faces and start trying to believe. Then we're told we can't do anything - all we have to do is believe - so, many of us carry on trying to believe without gulping in breath or screwing up our faces BUT we see no difference in our lives.
2. Let's discuss today how much of our effort and how much of God's effort is required to enable us to live forever with Him after death - and let's do it in connection with this next verse that we're studying: Romans 9:16.
3. The reason people tell us we can't do anything but believe is that they feel this verse states that salvation or our acceptance by God has nothing at all to do with man's will, but is totally a matter of God's grace and man appropriates it for himself by adopting a certain mental attitude to the Bible's explanation of Jesus' death.
4. However, if you take this literally and man's will has nothing at all to do with his salvation, then logically the only reason some of us are accepted and others rejected is either that God arbitrarily predestines

some to heaven and others to hell-- or that God saves all of us unconditionally and universally so that none will be lost at all. To avoid that heresy they introduce one condition that man has to fulfil: he has to "believe", so we feel somehow you can believe without exercising your will, and so satisfy the second part of Romans 9:16.

5. This popular emphasis today appeals to two current tendencies in twentieth century man:

(i) He likes to think he is so moulded and determined by his heredity and circumstances that he cannot exercise his will against them AND

(ii) He loves to live in the realm of mental experience -- his mind and emotions -- rather than the actual one of actions and words. So the popular interpretation of this verse is that salvation is all of God's grace and man appropriates it for himself by adopting a certain mental attitude to the Bible's explanation of Jesus' death.

6. That explanation is simply this: God required us to obey His laws and declared that we would die if we didn't, but then (out of love for us) He provided His Son to die in our place. If we believe that, then it doesn't matter if we fail to obey His laws, He will accept us anyway. This is how popular Christianity interprets this verse and the part that God has and the part that man has in our salvation:

7. It has obviously two great weaknesses:

(i.) It is utterly illogical - God unjustly killing the innocent person instead of the guilty one and therefore appearing to be arbitrary in changing obedience to the Ten Commandments to mental acceptance of the death of Jesus as the basis for man's salvation.

(ii) Secondly, it has produced thousands of Christians who believe right but do not live right because their wills don't appear to have been involved in their conversion!

## GOD'S MERCY

1. So, most of us interpret Romans 9:16 as saying God has done it all in Jesus - man can do nothing but believe it - and if he isn't experiencing closeness to God or change in his behaviour all he can do is believe harder because obviously it has nothing to do with man's will or exertion. This has led to a generation of Christians who are purely cerebral in their faith i.e. they are involved in a mental and emotional appropriation of facts rather than in a real spiritual regeneration that touches and changes their wills.

2. What is the meaning of Romans 9:16? Obviously that the initiative was taken by God. Sarah was 90 years old but God took the initiative and promised her and Abraham that they would have a son. It wasn't due to their will or exertion - it was due to God doing what He promised - Miraculously creating in the womb of a 90 year old woman a little baby. Similarly it wasn't due to Isaac's will or exertion - he just lay there and was born.

3. It was the same with God's choice of Jacob, the younger son, instead of his elder brother Esau. Jacob's will and exertion or that of his mother simply made a mess of things. It was God who promised that the older would serve the younger, and it was God that gave the patriarchal promises to Jacob. Jacob's own snatching, manipulating, supplanting ways only served to virtually sabotage God's plans.

4. It's the same with us. See Romans 5:8. God looked down upon the perfect people He had made to live off His love and His Spirit and He saw a bunch of perverts --people who were to get their sense of worth from a consciousness of His love, rejecting that love and trying to prove their worth by beating out other people; a group of drug addicts who were meant to find happiness in a love relationship with the Infinite Person who had made them, now utterly hooked by the thrills they could get from each other and the world of nature; a world of junkies, who were meant to have security from knowing that their loving Father controlled their lives, utterly enslaved by their desperate search for food, shelter, and clothing. God looked down at us with our perverted personalities, our mental and emotional addictions, our physical dependencies--unable to help ourselves because we now lacked His Spirit of life and were therefore dead to Him spiritually-- and God had mercy. Not that He accepted us that way--because that would be to make heaven hell BUT that He took steps, He initiated a plan, He set on foot a scheme, by which we would be changed and re-created and re-generated and born again, and His will determined to save all who took part in this plan.

5. Much the same as with the first astronauts who returned from the moon and were immediately put in a de-contamination chamber to rid them of any extra-terrestrial viruses that they might have picked up. They remained, you remember, in that sterile atmosphere for several days before their debriefing, and then at last they were deemed fit to re-enter relationships with the rest of us. So too, God set up a cosmic de-contaminating chamber in His Own Dear Son Jesus, placed us all - every one of us - in Him--and levelled the laser beams and the powerful chemotherapy of His wrath upon our perverted personalities, our mental and emotional addictions, and our physical weaknesses, and utterly destroyed in Jesus the deformed monstrosities we had become. The old race of mankind was ended and the new race could begin: 1 Corinthians 15:45-49

6. This great de-contaminating act of God in Christ is our guarantee that God loves us and has provided universal atonement for every human being: 2 Corinthians 5:19. The decontaminating chamber of Christ's death is there - clear evidence that God loves us, forgives us, and is ready to receive us! This salvation is due to God's mercy -- we have tried so often to reform our own lives, to change our behaviour, to recreate our personalities, and we could not - not by ALL our will and exertion. The ground of our salvation is utterly God's mercy.

7. But the Holy Spirit can only make that actual in our personal lives if we are willing! Atonement is universal but regeneration is conditional!

#### MAN'S WILL

1. In other words, what if the astronaut Neil Armstrong had stepped out of the space capsule, walked towards the crew of the recovery vessel, and one of his superiors had stepped forward and said: "You have to spend the next 48 hours in the decontaminating chamber, and then when we're sure you've been absolutely cleared of all alien viruses, you can resume normal relationships with the rest of us" --what if Armstrong had replied: "Oh, I believe that - now let me past til I kiss my wife!?" You know the response he'd be given - "Just believing the decontaminating chamber will decontaminate you won't do a thing - you have to actually enter it and spend a couple of days there, then we'll guarantee you're clean."

2. This is the same with the cosmic decontaminating chamber of Christ's death: Romans 6:5. No will or exertion of ours provided this great miracle of Noah's Ark in which we can be saved BUT if we do not accept our unity with Christ in His death, we will not be united with Him this new life. The Holy Spirit alone

can reveal to us what God did to us in Jesus -- no mere mental assent but BELIEVE: Romans 6:11: Treat yourself as really dead. The proof? You have the power to (Romans 6:12-13); and you receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Ephesians 1:13-14.

3. How can you tell those who simply believe (James 2:19) from those who have been cleansed in Jesus and received the Holy Spirit? 1 John 3:10, John 3:36

## CONCLUSION

1. So the choosing who accept and submit to the consequences of our cosmic death with Christ is due absolutely to God's mercy and not man's exertion or will BUT our acceptance of the consequences of our death with Jesus is directly connected with our willingness-- therefore "Let not sin reign"

2. We cannot change our perverted personalities, but unless we willingly accept and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal, actualise, and reproduce in us Jesus' death to self and resurrection to God, we will never experience a real relationship with Our Creator.

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