

Romans 9:19 Free and Accountable

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon emphasizes that God created humanity with free will for the purpose of genuine love and accountability, challenging societal views on responsibility and moral values.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26, Genesis 2:9, Romans 2:4, Romans 9:19, 1 John 1:3

Topics: "Free Will", "Human Responsibility"

Description

Ernest O'Neill addresses the misconceptions surrounding human responsibility and freedom, emphasizing the importance of understanding God's purpose in creating us with free will and the capacity to choose. He highlights the need to reject the idea of blaming God for the consequences of our choices and the significance of embracing the gift of freedom to choose right over wrong. O'Neill challenges the notion of human beings as mere reflex-driven creatures and delves into the core of God's intention in making us His friends to share in His fellowship.

Transcript

INTRODUCTION

1. "If you leave your key in your ignition you deserve to be fined because you are putting temptation in the way of some young teenager who might then steal your car and hurt himself or others." I would just point out two assumptions underlying this accepted axiom:

i. The wrongness of stealing is somehow played down and the stealer is encouraged to blame the person whose property he stole so, however we do it, we manage to take the emphasis off the absolute "Thou shalt not steal" and put it on the relative "Thou shalt not leave thy keys in the ignition in certain circumstances at certain times."

ii. The stealer is regarded by society and therefore encouraged to regard himself as a poor little animal who is motivated like Pavlov's dogs solely by reflex responses over which he has no control. His eyes glimpse the ignition keys--he cannot prevent his foot pressing the accelerator.

2. This indifference to absolute values of right and wrong, and the tacit assumption that human beings are not free--are the twin assumptions underlying the recent rejection of a certain local judge by his own community. You remember that a teenage guy was reacting justifiably to the pressures of the society in which he lived. That was just too much to take and the people rose up against this suggestion that the

raped was more guilty than the one who actually committed the crime. Nevertheless, one would have to admit that much of our legal system at the present time is based on these two heretical, invalid principles: there are no absolute values-things that are right or wrong at all times, and secondly, human beings aren't really free or responsible for their actions.

3. They both stem from a widespread misunderstanding of the nature of the Dear Person who made us - a misunderstanding that probably lurks in some sense in the back of your mind. It's expressed in today's verse: Romans 9:19.

4. We would normally elaborate it like this: "If God has made us capable of sinning and getting sick and put us in a world where little children die of cancer, and people can kill millions with one bomb, then is God not finally responsible for it all, and is He not wrong in holding us accountable?" Because we have not really solved the problem of evil and a good God, many of us feel in some way justified in behaving as if we can't help it, and this personal irresponsibility is the cancer eating away at the fabric of Western society today.

5. I believe it all becomes absolutely clear and simple if we see why God made us in the first place.

GOD'S PURPOSE

1. Why did God make us? The simple answer is in 1 John 1:3. God did not make us as little toys that He could observe or as agents who would supervise the universe; He did not make us as pitiful objects of His love to save. God made us to be His friends, to share His fellowship, so that we could love Him and He could love us: not that He needed us because He and His Son already had a beautiful personal relationship of peace and joy together, but it is the nature of love to want to share that with others.

2. That explains why they gave us the capacities we have (Genesis 1:26): so that we could be like them and therefore be able to love and understand and share fully with them. Here on earth we know a human being can only get limited amount of satisfaction from having a pet dog or a pet cat--there's only so much response you can get from them: tail-wagging and barking when you're going for a walk; rapt attention when you're ladling out the ice-cream, but empty stares as you read Shakespeare or play Beethoven or discuss the coal miners' strike, and utter incomprehension as you talk about your own inner feelings. This is why God made us with the same capacities as He Himself has: details in Genesis 2:7. Three levels of perception: world, self, God. All human beings possess these capacities PLUS the most important one of all.

3. We all know that you can put three human beings with these capacities together in a room and they can be as distant from each other as if they were miles apart. It takes more than the possession of similar physical, mental and spiritual capacities to make people friends. Some use their bodies to dominate others, some to serve others, some use their minds to develop the world, some to forward their own selfish causes. For people to be close friends, they have to be similar inside-they have to possess the same moral qualities or attributes of character BUT those virtues like love and kindness and patience cannot be manufactured--they have to be chosen.

4. This is the most important capacity that Our Creator gave to us-He Himself is a self-determining Being-He is what He is because He chooses of His own free will to be that. The only beings that Our Creator could have lasting friendship and satisfaction with had also to be self-determining beings in His image. Finally, these are the only people who can love or be truly kind or have any of the moral qualities

that God and Jesus possess. This is exactly what God did: He gave us all as His creatures bodies, souls and spirits, and the free will to receive the Spirit-life that flows through Him Himself, and contains His love and kindness and peace. Thus we have to exercise our free wills to choose if we wanted this Holy Spirit: Genesis 2:9,16.

5. We know ourselves that deep, real personal relationships and friendships are possible only if both parties want of their own free will to enter into the relationship: the easiest thing for God to do was to make millions of us with the same capacities as Himself and then program us so that we could speak and act and think only in love and kindness and could therefore do nothing but love Him EXCEPT that we could then never have loved Him because whatever attitudes we had could be described as passivity or resignation or mute-animal-like submission, but love desiring to give and share and understand and enjoy can come only from a being that has free will.

MAN'S FREEDOM

1. But once our Creator gave us the free will to receive or reject the Spirit-life that flows through Him and His Dear Son, He had to be consistent and keep His hands off our wills as long as this world lasts. This has meant that down through the centuries God, in order to preserve the chance of anyone finally choosing to love Him and trust Him, has had to let us human beings freely choose to live by the Spirit of Jesus and love each other and spread the peace and health that comes from that or to live for ourselves and trample over each other and spread the fear and anxiety, the ulcers and hypertension, the disease and sickness that come from that.

2. Back to the verse we're studying today: Romans 9:19b: anyone - history is full of examples - Eden: we ate of the tree of knowledge; Egypt: 10 times Pharaoh rejected God's pleas; Wilderness: Israelites worshipped the golden calf despite God's warnings; Canaan: Jesus worshipped idols despite prophets' warnings. The whole of history demonstrates human ability to reject and resist the Creator's wishes.

3. Romans 9:19a: because our Creator knows we are responsible for what we do and for the consequences of our actions, and therefore holds us accountable: Romans 2:4-13

CONCLUSION

1. In other words, it is unjust to blame God for giving us the opportunity to share His fellowship by giving us the same capacities as He has together with His own Spirit-life and the free will to choose it--simply because we rejected it and created a Hell on earth: the gift of freedom to choose right and reject wrong does not make the giver responsible for the choice of wrong.

2. Even the personality we've inherited has been neutralised in its paralysing power by the cosmic death of our old self with Christ so that we are truly free to choose because of the great compensating work of God's grace within.

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