

Romans 9:24a Who Are God's People?

by Ernest O'Neill

For children of God, evil is not a problem, but a fact of life that God has transformed into a glorious means of delivering us from our own limitations and our imagined self-sufficiency.

Scripture: Exodus 16:1, Exodus 16:6, Romans 9:22-24, 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 1:2

Topics: "Free Will", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

Ernest O'Neill addresses the common skepticism surrounding the problem of evil, emphasizing the necessity of free will in choosing to love God. He explains how God's plan involves using evil to draw His children closer to Him and transform them into reflections of His love and kindness. O'Neill challenges listeners to recognize self-sufficiency as the true evil that separates us from God, highlighting the need for complete dependence on Him for true transformation and growth.

Transcript

INTRODUCTION

1. Well, I'd believe in a loving God if it weren't for the problem of evil - but that's just too hard to swallow. I mean, I can't accept that a loving God would allow thousands to die in the Soviet archipelago of prison camps or would allow Hitler to gas millions of Jews! " That is the normal expression of scepticism that goes under the general heading of the problem of evil.

2. How could a good and loving and all-powerful God let evil continue in His world? If He can't stop it, He isn't almighty, and if He won't stop it, He isn't loving! Yet all of us who have had to face the training and guiding of children or others under our care have taken the same attitude as God: we can guard and protect them from all evil influences in a sterile, protected environment or we can let them go out to school, the world, and society and choose for themselves-none of us have any doubt that the freedom of their wills to choose for themselves is more important even than freedom from pain.

3. So with Our Creator-once He resolved to create free agents like Himself who would have free will to choose whether they wanted to be His friends and live in love with Him forever, He opened the door to the possibility of a Machiavelli or a Hitler who would choose to reject His Creator's Spirit and instead inflict suffering on others. So the moment God would use His power to coerce Hitler's will when He was giving even one order to kill, that moment free will and the possibility of any human being freely choosing to love God would disappear forever from the universe.

4. So, many theists accept that the existence of evil is a necessary inconvenience and nuisance and unpleasantness if we are ever to become responsible free people who will choose to love God because we want to not because we are forced to. A theist is a thinker who believes there is some kind of Supreme Being but knows nothing more about him or it; many of us who are Christians have simply a theistic attitude to evil-it is a necessary but inexpedient phenomenon that we have to endure in this life-a less than the best way to make free will possible.

5. The result of this attitude is found in our lack of peace and rest day by day when evil touches us: we are irritated and have a self-pitying feeling of hurt when our roommate's chaotic carelessness prevents us from finding the sweater or the shoes that we had carefully placed so that we'd be on time for our appointment; we have only a negative response deep-down when we are fired unfairly from a job; we feel we are valiant martyrs and see absolutely nothing redemptive in the fact that we are tied to certain relatives for life. In other words, our attitude to evil in our lives reflects our failure to see it as anything but an unfortunate interruption in Our Dear Father's perfect plan for us and His family.

GOD'S PLAN

1. Our Dear Father's attitude is as different from that as night is from day: never do God or Jesus or His Faithful children adopt such a down-at-the-mouth, grin-and-bear-it, let's-put-up-with-it attitude to anything-least of all to such an ever-present and pervading phenomenon as evil. God never allows anything to exist that He cannot use and His attitude is plainly expressed in Romans 9:22: paraphrase: there the negative finishes, then the whole magnificent positive plan that God executes: Romans 9:23: paraphrase: so that he can lead His strength and life to the victims so that they will become more like Him as they depend on Him fully. In other words, God endures Hitler imprisoning Corrie Ten Boom in a concentration camp so that he may impart to her His love for the gestapo and she in turn may reflect that love through her books and her life. Suddenly evil becomes not something to be endured alone but a clear sign that more of God's life is on its way to you.

2. So with the Jews, you remember: Exodus 16:6-7, 13-15: God promised they would see His glory-Him as He really is in visible, tangible ways-just as Thomas experienced Jesus-fingers in His hands, hand in His side; the next morning God's life became bread-the very thing they needed most in that situation into which evil had driven them BUT they would never have ended up in that predicament where they began to experience the love and kindness and faithfulness of God, if He had not endured with much patience Pharaoh, and allowed the Egyptian King to inflict evil on the Jews!

US

1. Today's verse: Romans 9:24: us too - you too! "Me? Not me - oh no! I understand your philosophising about the problem of evil-and I'm with you-and I see, of course, how God had to deal as He did with the Jews, But not me! I really believe in God's love-I do - I really believe He is gracious and kind - really, I don't need the crude experience with evil to drive me to God-I'll just pray like it says: "Deliver me from evil."

2. But what is real evil? Is it pain or suffering, is it poverty or unhappiness, is it loneliness or discomfort-no, here is real evil from which we need to be delivered: Exodus 16:1-3: self-sufficiency: that's sin - the tendency in us to want whatever security and happiness, however limited it may be, as long as we can control it ourselves and not have to depend on and trust God: we are incorrigibly self-sufficient and independent-therefore we remain stunted dwarfs instead of the world-bestriving gigantic princes and princesses that God's life wants to make us-and therefore naturally we treat anything that is beyond our

own resources as something evil and unpleasant and to be resented.

3. Our attitude is like the old man who was carrying a great bundle of wood on his shoulder when a passing farmer offered him a ride on his donkey-cart. The old man got up beside the farmer and put his bundle of wood on his knees in front of him. After about a quarter of a mile, the farmer looked at him and said: "Why don't you set the wood on the cart behind you and relax?" and the old man replied: "No, no, it's good enough of you and your donkey to give me a ride but I don't want you to have to carry my wood as well." We are like that-we have our bodies from God, we ride in His space-ship earth, we depend on His Spirit to hold the atoms together, but we lack rest and relaxation in Him because we live under the illusion that we can carry some things without His help, so we refuse to recognise or live in reality-that everything we have comes from Him and therefore everything we need, He gives us! God uses evil to drive us beyond ourselves and to demonstrate clearly to us that this life is too big for us to live on our own, and was meant to be lived by co-operative dependence on Him and His supernatural life.

4. But we all here already know this-life is most vital, most real-God is most vivid, our dependence on Him most complete, in times of stress. It seems we were made, in this life anyway, for adversity: London Times: 5 May 1978: Peter Howard Letter. As with a nation, so with us individuals, our finest hour is when we live beyond ourselves, beyond our own strength, reaching out in desperation and grasping by faith the patience or the courage or the joy of Jesus, by which we are transformed from glory to glory into the very likeness of Him whose life we draw into ourselves!

5. So the way to make a weight-lifter is not ice-cream and chocolate and strawberry malts and relaxing by the beach day after day but lifting weights-just heavy enough to stretch him a little more: so God's grace is not in protecting us from the evil that can only be faced by Jesus but my allowing us to face just enough to cause us to stretch a little beyond ourselves for the Spirit of Jesus that will make us a little more like Him: I Corinthians 10:13.

CONCLUSION

1. So for children of God, evil is not a problem, but a fact of life that God has transformed into a glorious means of delivering us from our own limitations and our imagined self-sufficiency: not a problem but an opportunity for Jesus' life to become real to us, a new death to ourselves and a new manifestation of Jesus' Resurrection in us: James 1:2.

2. When that person tries us beyond reason and beyond our own normal patience, we look up and see Jesus standing in triumph with all the world under His feet; so, when we are utterly ignored beyond our own humility's ability to bear, when we are given something that is utterly unfair, when others' greed and cruelty bring disaster to our lives: what we are willing to ask Jesus for of love and faith, He will give us: limited only by our willingness to ask!

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