

The Purpose of Frustration

by Ernest O'Neill

God's laws are meant to drive us to despair, to show us that our trying is the problem, not our badness, and to lead us to change our nature, not just our behaviour.

Scripture: Genesis 8:21, Psalm 51:10, Ezekiel 36:26, John 3:3, Acts 17:30, Romans 7:13, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9

Topics: "Inner Transformation", "Dependence On God"

Description

Ernest O'Neill delves into the paradox of human nature, exploring the tension between desiring goodness while resisting 'goody-goodness'. He explains that our true nature is designed to be better through an intimate relationship with our Creator, and our conscience guides us to live up to His standards. The purpose of God's laws is to reveal our inability to be truly good without depending on Him, leading us to despair and recognizing our need for inner transformation. O'Neill emphasizes that changing our behavior is not enough; our nature must be transformed by depending on God completely.

Transcript

"I can't be a goody-goody. I just have to be myself!" We like that kind of comment because we identify "goody-goodies" with hypocrites who pretend not to feel what the rest of us feel. They study to please the "authorities" by meticulous adherence to moral norms. They irritate us to death!

On the other hand we aren't happy with the idea of trying to be out-and-out evil ourselves. Something inside us makes us want to be "normal", and normal involves being kind, generous, caring, honest, and loyal. But we find there is also something in us that is repulsed by "goody-goodness" and yet stops us being as good as we feel we ought to be. What's the explanation of this paradox in people like ourselves? And is there any way to escape it?

Why Are We Not as Good as We Want to Be?

The explanation is that we're made to be better than we are--naturally! We're like cars that are made to run on Super gasoline but they're trying to make do with Regular. We're made to be powered by an intimate trusting relationship to the Maker of the world. Treating him as our faithful Father creates in us great peace and forbearance to other people--we don't covet or steal. But when we live as if we have no great Father who cares for us, we thresh around full of envy and anxiety. Our Creator wants us to realize we're missing a relationship with Him that makes us naturally like Him, so he has built into us a memory of

what life is like with him as our friend. That memory is our conscience and it makes us want to "live up" to his laws.

But the laws of God are just descriptions of the way we automatically live if we trust Him. They're like Technical Manuals for a car that runs on Super gasoline or petrol. If you run the car on Regular, the laws or performance "specs" for Super gas will frustrate you to death. However much you try, you'll never match the specification standards for Super gas UNLESS you use Super gas! That's the purpose of the so-called "laws of God"--they exist to "frustrate you to death". So the paradox that we talked about at the beginning is really God's plan. We want to be better than we are but we dislike people who try to be good themselves because--deep down--we know goodness is the result of a relationship, not the condition for a relationship.

Why Are the Ten Commandments So Frustrating?

The purpose of the laws of God is to drive us to despair. Paul wrote this in Romans 7:13--"Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."

In other words, you try to obey the laws of God. You fail, fail, fail. You try, try, try. And fail, fail, fail. Until you see that your very trying is the problem. It's not your badness that is the problem--it's your goodness--YOUR goodness! You think you're still able to be good on your own without God--that's sin! It's the way you live in inner dependence on the world of people, things, and circumstances instead of on God.

Our attempts to reproduce the symptoms of a God-trusting life without trusting God are the ultimate declaration of independence. This is why we hate "goody-goodies" and why religious people and churches who emphasize morality rather than trust in God seem so obnoxious.

How Do We Escape From Our Condition?

First-by seeing the real problem. The problem is not changing our behaviour, but changing US. However much we improve on our morals, we'll never be like God until we begin to depend on him for everything. That's why God allowed the Jews to live in frustration for 2,000 years--for our benefit. They became utterly preoccupied with his laws. They are known as people of the law. They still discuss it, dissect it, honour it, elevate it. Yet they find it is still not natural to reproduce it in their lives. It seems more natural to disobey it than obey it. They have tried to change their behaviour for 2,000 years just as many of us have for 20 or 30 years. But we cannot! Regular gasoline cannot perform like Super gasoline, however much it tries. Its very essence has to be changed. This is why God did not destroy us all but allowed us to have 70 years here on earth. Moses recorded in Genesis 8:21--"the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

It's our nature that needs to be changed--not our behaviour or our morals. They will change when our nature is changed. This is why God "winked" at us; Acts 17:30 records Paul's statement in Athens: "The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent." Our Creator expects us to be changed now--because he has provided a way to change us--inside and out. The first step towards that is to see it's not our behaviour that has to change it's us. But we human beings have got used to what we are. Moreover, our nature is fixed deeply in our life-style. But, more than that, it has been

bred into our race for centuries--there's a reason why we can't do what we aspire to do in our best moments. We now are burdened with a psychological and physical nature that has developed its own ways and modes of operation. So, changing our natures is not just a case of keeping better company or reading some self-improvement books. Changing our nature means dealing with the very inner essence of humanity. Let's look in the next article at the extent of that change and see why it cannot be handled by one little human being's will.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ernest-o'neill/the-purpose-of-frustration/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net