

## REROUTING THE PERSONALITY

ROMANS 6:19

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I think that some of us probably have spent some time ourselves as patients in the psych ward and certainly many of us have visited psych wards. I think probably there are also many of us who are staff, nurses or counselors or doctors, in psych wards.

I think that the thing that strikes many of us about a psych ward is the terrible fact that the atmosphere is so often so disrupted by the emotional sicknesses of the other patients. The atmosphere itself tends to make anyone who comes into it, sick, even if they aren't sick themselves when they first go in.

I think many of us would attest to that. Often there is such an atmosphere of emotional instability, insecurity, irritation and discontent that whenever you go into that atmosphere yourself, you find that you are being bombarded by all the emotional instability. It tends to have the effect of upsetting you yourself and disturbing you.

Now, this is no reason for abolishing psych wards or for saying that no one has ever been helped in a psych ward. I think there are many of us who have presumably received some help in a psych ward. But it is important to see that this is one of the real limitations that you have in wards for psych patients. Whenever you group together a number of people who are suffering from emotional instability, they tend by their own erratic behavior to expand and extend that emotional instability to the other people around them. That's just a fact of life that you have to face and one of the limitations that nurses, doctors, counselors and even mildly ill patients face in a psych ward. It is trying to hold out from their own hearts, the shouting and noise that is coming from other patients who are sick in different ways.

This is what this verse of Romans says, that we're studying this morning. It's Romans 6:19b. If you label the first part of the verse 'a', second part 'b' and last part 'c', it would be Romans 6:19b, "For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity". That's really the truth that God is revealing to us. As you yield your members to impurity, you end up yielding them to greater and greater impurity, to greater and greater iniquity.

In other words, the more you use your body to express certain impurities, iniquities or certain emotional excesses, the more that impurity or that iniquity or that emotional excess grows and begins to take over you yourself and take over the atmosphere. The Greek really makes it clear. A literal Greek translation reads like this, "You presented your members as slaves of uncleanness for the power of uncleanness and of lawlessness for the power of lawlessness."

In other words 'greater and greater' is not actually in the Greek. But the Greek says, "You presented your members as slaves of impurity for the power of impurity". In other words, as you present your members to impurity, the power of impurity grows wherever you are. And as you present your members as slaves of iniquity, so it's for the power of iniquity. So the power of iniquity grows itself.

Lenski, the Lutheran commentator that I think is very reliable on Romans says, "This power grows the

more men lend their members as slaves to do its will". So the power of evil grows the more men lend their members to do its will. The power of impurity grows, the more men and women lend their members to it to do its will. The power of emotional instability grows, the more men and women lend their own emotions to do its will.

One of the problems of course with the psych wards is that there is a school of psychology that does not believe this truth that God has revealed to us. There is a school of psychology that in fact teaches the opposite and often this kind of psychology governs what goes on in the psych wards. Psychologists of this school would say, "You ought to express what is inside you. If you're angry, let it out. If you resent a friend, let it out. If you don't let it out, you'll get pimples or you'll get guilt complexes or you become a miserable inhibited human being."

But they tend to teach as people would teach in the old days, that dreadful things would happen to you if you involved yourself in some sexual immorality.

So they have their little witch hunts. They tend to say that if you ever keep anger inside you, then you're going to be in trouble and it's vital to express clearly everything that is inside. The result is that the psych wards particularly can be noisy and chaotic, with everybody getting out their anger and their frustration at their mother or their pet dog or their irritability with their boss. There's just a continual atmosphere of emotional chaos and instability. God's word says that if you actually do express the things that are inside you like that, the power of that thing that you're submitting yourself to actually grows in the universe. It actually increases intensity. It doesn't decline.

So, we're forced to see by the truth that is stated here in Romans 6:19 that getting everything out does not actually cure things. It actually makes matters worse. It actually enables the feeling inside you to increase in intensity. Many of us have found at home that we wanted to yell at our mom or our brother or sister. We held it in for a long time and then we couldn't hold it any longer and we started to let it go.

Or, a husband and wife, at the beginning of their marriage felt, "Oh, the marriage is supposed to be beautiful. It's supposed to be something where I never am bad tempered with the other person, where I never criticize the other person." You walk like that and that's why we talk about the honeymoon don't we?

We say, "The honeymoon lasted so long in our marriage." We're careful for a while of each other and then bit-by-bit we begin to let it out and express it until you know what happens to the atmosphere. I don't need to tell you that the atmosphere doesn't improve. The atmosphere in the home becomes noisier and more insensitive. That's how people progress from a relatively small degree of difference and disagreement with each other to the time when they can actually take a gun and shoot each other.

Surely that's how it progresses. You express it and once you've expressed it, it grows a little stronger and you become a little more comfortable with it and the other person gets a little more used to it. You express it a little more until it grows bigger and bigger, and eventually you can't control it at all.

Now, that's what God's word is saying. The more you express lust, the stronger it grows. The more you yell at each other, the more insensitive you become. The more you express your impatience, the more you feel you have the right to be impatient. Now really the truth is that the words mentioned in Romans 6:19 are very neutral words. It's a very neutral entity.

If you look at it, Romans 6:19, "For just as you once yielded your members to impurity." The word for members is 'melos'. It means your limbs and actually your mouth, your hands, your arms, your whole body, your face, your ability to change your face into different expressions. Your members, the parts of your body, are actually neutral animal organisms.

They can be trained to react one way or to react another way and that's the truth of it. If your mouth gets used to smiling, then your mouth will tend to go into a smile. Now, it won't dominate you. You can still pull it back but your mouth will tend to smile more often than not if you use it for smiling. If you are sarcastic and cynical with people all the time because you're defensive and you're afraid then your mouth will get used to smirking and you will find if you sit there just doing nothing and look in the mirror, you're smirking.

"I didn't mean to smirk but my mouth fell into a smirk", and that's true. That's why we draw those little figures with a mouth that has a smile on it. The mouth goes that way because it's smiling and then it goes that way if it's frowning. People's faces are neutral animal organisms that can be trained to behave in a certain way almost naturally.

Now I agree with you, you can always override them. But when you're not overriding and ruling them they'll tend to fall into the pattern that you've trained them in. You can see it in so many ways. If you're a table tennis player and I do that, then you'll do that – you'll chop because it's just natural. If I do that, you'll stand back. There are certain movements that I do and you just have a physical reaction to them.

If you're a tennis player and you're not Bobby Riggs and I do that, then you will chop back. You'll respond to me in regard to various things that I do. If you play baseball and I do that, you'll do that. In other words, your body is trained to respond in certain ways to certain provocations and stimulations. I am not teaching behavioral psychology. But I am suggesting to you that if you train your body to go in a certain direction again and again and again, then it does tend to get used to that.

It doesn't make you behave that way all the time. It isn't determinist but it does tend to fall into that pattern. Now that's really what God is saying, you see in Romans 6:19b, "For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity". The truth is that if we get used to yielding ourselves to anger and to expressing impatience and irritability instead of keeping it inside, then eventually, those powers inside will become greater and greater qualities of our lives. More and more we'll find our lives will be angry lives. More and more we'll find our lives will be irritable lives. More and more we'll find our lives will be unclean lives.

So loved ones, I do encourage you to see the difference between the fallible and invalid psychological principle on the one hand and the truthful and valid spiritual principle on the other. In fact it is important what you use your bodies for. The way you use your bodies, the way you give them over to certain attitudes, that power will tend to increase and dominate your life.

Now, the psychologists would come back this morning and say, "Well, what do you want us to become? Do you want us to be miserable, little, inhibited beings who have all kinds of harmful passions eating away with ulcers inside us so that we become sick and depressed? Is that what you want us to become? Surely if you let the thing out, you can analyze it and do something about it."

And that's what I thought. I worked on my jealousy, and I tried to get the jealousy out. That wasn't hard. Then I tried to analyze the jealousy and I worked out, "All right, the jealousy is partly there because of inferiority and that comes from my mother. I won't go into the reasons for that but my inferiority partly comes from my mother. Okay, that's right. Then the jealousy is there also because I have a burning ambition to be somebody. When I see somebody that seems to be somebody better than I am, then I get jealous."

"Yes, all right. Now I know why it's there." Brothers and sisters, I analyzed it and I got it out. I tried to put it in psychological terms and then I began to try to think positively of my contemporaries. I knew you didn't have to just analyze it; you had to think positively and think lovingly about them. So I analyzed the jealousy and I started to try to think positively.

Indeed, I started to do those little tricks like praise them. "Oh, I must praise that person. Okay, that was very good what you did." Or, I thought I should admire them. So, I tried to work up a feeling of admiration for them and it was just from the mouth out.

I think many of us have found that we've come to the place where we've analyzed the stuff, thought it out, re-analyzed it, hashed it and re-hashed it. We've read Dale Carnegie's books and we've read Norman Vincent Peale's books. We've tried in all kinds of ways to overcome these things. But, after having analyzed them completely and trying all the psychological tricks I could, still I found myself jealous. I was just jealous, that was it. I still had jealousy inside. And that's why it was such a relief for me, and such a ray of hope when I saw that the reason I was jealous was not because of my mom and it was not because of my ambition.

The reason I was jealous was because I thought I had the right to be jealous. I felt that I was the best person in the world. I really felt that I was better than most other people and if only people would begin to look at it the right way, they'd recognize that too. I began to see that I was jealous because I felt I had the right to always have things my way.

I felt I had the right to always defend my rights, to always insist on my dignity, to always have everyone bow to what I wanted them to do. I began to see slowly that I was jealous because I thought I was God. God wasn't God, nobody else was God but I was God. In lots of little ways in my life, I dealt with others as if I were God and I saw that it was just a massive monster self inside me.

You know we've spent the past few months talking about that and what a relief it was when I saw that that self was a power too great for me to deal with. It was a supernatural power that I could not change, tame or train. It was so good when I saw Romans 6:6 and you know it, almost without looking at it.

"We know that our old self was crucified with him." It was so good when I saw that I was crucified with Jesus. The old self that gets jealous, was destroyed by God in Jesus. Then of course it suddenly hit me, "Yes, but why is it so alive inside you?" It was then that I saw that I wasn't ready to let my old self be crucified.

The reason why it still dominated me was because it was really the lie of the old self that dominated me. I was not willing to be crucified with Jesus. I began to see that the way to enter into this in actuality was in Romans 6:11, "So you also must consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."

I had lots of plans for my future and lots of desires for people to think well of me. I certainly had no plans to go to my own funeral. It was a battle to come to the point where I saw that I wasn't ever going to be released from that old self unless I did come to the place where I was willing to die with Jesus, to die to self, to die to my right to defend myself, to die to my right to assert my own value and to get my own way in all kinds of situations.

That for me, was the first step in -- a readiness to reckon myself dead, to treat myself as deserving nothing that Jesus did not feel he deserved and as demanding nothing from people that Jesus did not feel he had a right to demand. And then, in Romans 6:13, a readiness not to yield my members to sin as instruments of wickedness but to yield myself to God as a man who has been brought from death to life and my members to God as instruments of righteousness. It was that day-to-day obedience to the Holy Spirit that delivered me from that dreadful desire to be jealous, irritable and angry with other people.

And that's what we've talked about for some time; the miracle by which God, the Holy Spirit delivers you from that selfish will. Now, what we want to do is go a step further today. We saw two Sundays ago that God frees us from the desire to disobey him. So when it comes to coveting somebody else's coat or somebody else's car, you find you're free at last to obey that commandment. You're free not to covet. Where it says if you're angry with your brother, you're guilty of the judgment, you find that you're free from anger so that you can obey God and avoid being angry with them.

You remember we said two Sundays ago that it brings you into a perfect obedience. It brings you into a place where you're at last free not to sin. You're at last free to obey God. Remember the other thing we said was that it's not sinless perfection, it's perfect obedience.

Now what I'd like to share this morning is just a little more on why it isn't sinless perfection. The reason it isn't sinless perfection is because we have minds and emotions and bodies that have been affected by the lack of the Holy Spirit over generations. Our minds were created in perfect balance. We would have worked out Einstein's theory precisely without having the trouble that he had, if we had been as we were at the very beginning of creation.

Our minds were in perfect balance. But through the lack of the Holy Spirit, the mind has become impaired so that we often make mistakes in judgment. So often, because you love a person with your whole heart, you'll intend with a perfect pure intention (because of the cleansing of the Holy Spirit) to reveal Jesus to them. But your mind lacks perfection in judgment. And so you'll judge wrongly. You'll say the wrong thing or you'll say it in words that will actually confuse them.

So you won't be walking in sinless perfection. You'll be walking in perfect obedience. You'll have a perfect intention to please the Father, but you won't always be able to do things perfectly. You remember the illustration we used one morning about a little blind girl who wanted to write a letter to her dad that would really please him on his birthday?

She got a piece of paper and tied lines of string across the piece of paper. Each time the pen would come down to the string, she'd feel it and she'd be able to know that that was at the bottom of the line. She kept the lines straight and laboriously over 15-20 minutes wrote the letter. When it came to her dad it was up and down every which way because the string hadn't worked. At times it was loose and at times she hadn't felt it was there. But her dad was delighted because the intention was perfect. The intention was pure and he knew the trouble that she had gone through to please him.

Now, that's what we mean by perfect obedience. It's a state or an attitude, which God can look upon and see perfect purity and intention coming from our hearts even though our minds are impaired.

Our emotions have been without the Holy Spirit for generations as well and so our emotions are often unbalanced. Often we inherit some emotional imbalance from our mom or our dad. Often our mom is a "gusher" and so we're gushers too. We don't want to put people off by the superficiality of our love but we welcome them on Sunday mornings and give them the big welcome that just suffocates them with motherly love. They are put off completely but it's not because we intended to. Our heart was perfect and pure but our emotions were unbalanced.

And so it is with our bodies. Our bodies are often weak and tired and we cannot do the things that the spirit from within wants us to do. Now that's why we don't come into sinless perfection. We come into perfect obedience but because of impaired minds, unbalanced emotions and weakened bodies we often end up in unintentional sins that we didn't intend to do. We say words that we didn't intend to say, and express emotions that we didn't intend to express.

Now that's brothers and sisters what Paul means in Romans 6:19a, when he says, "I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations." The word there in Greek for natural limitations is the word 'sarx' and the Greek students this morning know that 'sarx' means the flesh. It doesn't mean just the body but the independent attitude that we have towards God.

Now that independent attitude has two parts. It has a rebellious selfish will that doesn't want God's way at all and it has minds, emotions and bodies that have been programmed for years in the wrong way. Now that's why Paul says, "Look, I am speaking to you in human terms because of your natural limitations."

Now what is he saying in human terms? Well, look at Romans 6:18b. He says in 18a, "Having been set free from sin". That's what we experience when we're crucified with Christ and cleansed from the old desire to have our own way. "You have become slaves of righteousness", and then he says, "Now I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations."

In other words, he is saying, "Look, after you have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, after you have experienced a real death to self with Jesus, don't you see that you have minds, emotions and bodies that are your 'melos'?" (Melos is the Greek word for members) Your members have been programmed for years to serve self. Now those things have to be re-programmed and that's why I talk about you becoming slaves of righteousness. In actual fact, you're not slaves; you're at last free for the first time in your life. You're free to disobey self and to obey God. But I am saying that you then have to come into a willing slavery to let the Holy Spirit re-program your mind, emotions, your will and your body into God's plan. And that's what Paul is saying.

"I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now yield your members to righteousness for sanctification." In other words, sanctification; being made holy, becoming like Jesus, becoming like God or having God's image restored in your life, is a two-fold work.

It is a crisis whereby you at last agree that I am not going to live for self any longer. I am willing to be crucified with Jesus as far as my self is concerned. It is a crisis experience whereby the Holy Spirit cleanses your heart from the desire to rebel against God. Then it is a process experience whereby your mind, emotions and your will are re-trained and re-programmed through you

allowing the purity of Jesus to come through them and express itself to the world. That's why I talked about the re-writing of the personality.

Brothers and sisters, you can't be freed from sin within and still have an old wildcat personality that needs to be re-routed and re-trained by the power of the Holy Spirit. What is the way to do it? It's a bit like that old song, 'Georgie Girl'. Let the First Corinthians 13 love that is never irritable or resentful, "Smile with your mouth a bit more". Let the First Corinthians 13 love that is not jealous or boastful, "Shine in the kindness of your eyes as often as possible". Let the First Corinthians 13 love that is not arrogant or rude, "Express itself a bit more often through the gentleness of your hands".

Let the First Corinthians 13 love that bears all things, believes all things and endures all things, "Begin to express itself through your whole body". This is so that the Holy Spirit can begin to re-route your old impaired mind, your unbalanced emotions and your weakened body into the real image of Jesus. It's so that you can enter into real sanctification and begin to become a person that reminds others of Jesus. That's really what God is saying to us this morning.

That's why I mentioned Jerry. I don't even know Jerry and have never met him. I can't tell which of you is Jerry. But I know that he is blind and that's why I say to you, when you look at the help page, don't just offer up a very holy prayer to God for Jerry. Don't offer up a good holy intention for the sister that needs typing help. Let the Holy Spirit begin to express His purity through you.

If you say to me, "Oh you're on behavioral psychology. You say just do it often enough and it'll help you inside." No, that basketwork approach does nothing. It does nothing for you. What I am saying is, "Allow the Holy Spirit to cleanse you inside and to rectify things inside so that you begin to have a real love of God and love of other people through your death to self with Jesus and then let that express itself out through you."

It's amazing, the way you'll begin to find your personality acting automatically like Jesus instead of acting automatically like Satan. It really does work and it's just so different to begin to find it easier to live an unselfish Cross life than to live an old self-centered self life. It does work and it's the way God meant us to go. We're to be going out instead of going in. So I pray that God will lead you into it.

I think there's a crisis work that is done in a moment but there's another work that goes on week after week and that's why we should be becoming a more and more beautiful image of Jesus every week. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for the completeness of your plan. We thank you that it really works its way out through the fingertips. It works its way out through our mouth and our eyes. We thank You Father that Your plan for sanctification is not just a once and for all crisis experience but it is a day-by-day expressing of the beauty that You've worked in us by that surgical operation, expressing that out through our whole personalities day-by-day and week-by-week.

So Father, we trust you that you will begin to teach us to re-write our whole personalities so that we will be images of Jesus to each other and to your world so that the two and a half billion people who do not know you will again begin to see Jesus walking in your eyes. We ask this in His name and for His name. Amen.

