

Bondage Of The Carnal Will

Romans 7:16

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the most famous biographies in English literature -- some of you will know immediately I mention it -- is Boswell's life of Dr. Samuel Johnson in the 18th century. And one of the qualities of Boswell's biography that makes it so good is his patent honesty. He records things as they really are. And he records his own feelings and his own experience as it really is.

And I think I have used this quotation once before, and some of you may remember it. He says this in his diary for Sunday, November 28, 1762, "I went to St. James's Church, and heard service, and a good sermon on 'By What Means Shall A Young Man Learn To Order his Ways,' in which the advantages of early piety were well-displayed. What a curious, inconsistent thing is the mind of man. In the midst of divine service, I was laying plans for having women, and yet I had the most sincere feelings of religion."

It's that moral perversity that all of us have experienced, that we're talking about these Sundays. It's that streak of irrationality that probably every one of us in this auditorium has experienced at some time or other that we're talking about, that wild Mr. Hyde that seems to be lurking underneath the respectable Dr. Jekyll.

We've agreed that many of us here are Christians. Many of us know that God has forgiven us our sins. Many of us really believe that Jesus had died for us, and indeed, we believe that He has put his Spirit inside us. And yet many of us have found that there is underneath all the outward appearance of Christianity, a great monster that really does what Dostoevsky says it does. It will act even against its own best advantage in order to have its own way.

Now it's that that we're discussing dear ones. I think it's important to share that at the beginning of each study, because some people are just here, maybe, for the first time today. But that's what we're talking about -- the difficulty that many of us have in walking the way we know we should walk -- in doing the things we know we should do.

Old Paul maybe puts it best of all. And maybe you'd look at it if you don't already know the verse off by heart. It's Romans 7:15. It's the classical description of this dilemma in which we find ourselves. "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate."

The approach most of us take to that problem is this. We decide we'll deal bit-by-bit with each problem area in our lives. So we see the impatience in our life, and we run a campaign in prayer and practice against impatience.

I think most of us here would agree that it's quite successful, initially, because you do seem to get some measure of control of your impatience. The trouble comes when you begin to move to your selfishness. You initiate a campaign of prayer and practice against your selfishness. And you seem to get a measure of victory over that. And then you decide, "It's going so well, well, I'll move on to the envy." And you start praying about envy, and concentrating and disciplining yourself by will power, against expressing envy. And then, horror of horrors, you find that some little monster is

beginning to push up its head over here. And it is the old selfishness that you thought you dealt with. And you've hardly seen its head, but you see the old impatience is coming up as well.

Many of us have found that that piecemeal dealing with defeated areas in our lives has not been very successful, over a long period of time. In fact, we often call that the 'fight of faith'. We keep praying this one down, praying that one down, praying this one down, and praying that one down. And you keep running from place to place, trying to stop the leaks.

Really, it reminds you of old Freud's theory. It reminds you of that theory of his you know, that 'we're just one great hydraulic system, where if you let the pressure out there, then it doesn't build up somewhere else. But if you stop it from getting out there, then it builds up somewhere else.' Really it suggests that almost, doesn't it? That it's impossible to deal with the thing.

If you hold this thing down here, it jumps up over here. If you hold it down over here, it appears over here. It's really a bit like some of us do -- some of us brothers who know we need an ordinary screw-driver or we need a Philips screw-driver, but we have an ordinary screw-driver. But we're determined to get that last old screw turned. And the tool is the wrong tool. Or the sisters who get the wrong needle for the wrong sewing job: you keep trying to make do. And you keep trying to make adjustments to the tool and try to use it a different way. And it's a long-long time before you eventually decide, "I've got the wrong tool. I just need a different tool. I need to change the whole thing, the whole system that I am using."

Really dear ones, that's what Paul has been saying to us, under God's direction, that the problem is not the individual areas of our life that are wrong. It's us ourselves. There's a whole thing wrong inside us that just needs to be changed. You remember he said it, if you look Romans 7:14, just a verse before the one we read. "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin." We've been discussing for some time that the problem with most of us is, our nature is all wrong. Our whole system has been turned inside out. And it's the whole system that has to be changed. It's not the impatience or the bad temper. It's not the unkindness or the unclean thoughts. It's the whole system inside our personality that has to be changed.

You know I have used this diagram often. And it can be used, I think, to bring it quickly to somebody's mind who has seen it for the first time, that the Bible really teaches that our own personal psychology is like that. [Shows 3 rectangles with the largest labeled "Body" and inside that a smaller labeled "Soul" and inside that the smallest labeled, "Spirit"] And it consists of the spirit and the soul and the body; spirit, soul and body, dear ones. And you get that, of course, in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

You remember we've shared often how it was God's plan that we should receive in our spirits, all that we needed to, from Him. In other words, for instance, in the case of our emotions, we should receive from God himself, all the love and affection that we needed. And then we should experience all that love and affection from God, our dear Father, who alone can love us perfectly, at the end of the day. And then we should begin to express that outwardly -- that we would receive from God, the Father, all the love that we need through his Holy Spirit -- and then that we would express that through our souls and then through our bodies and then out into the world. That was the way our personalities were meant to operate, from the inside out.

Now, you know what we've shared, that we rebelled against the whole idea of depending on God for

love alone and affection alone. We wanted to operate independently of Him. We wanted satisfaction for these emotions in our souls. We wanted the satisfaction whenever we wanted it -- not just whenever He wanted to give it to us. So, of course, we cut this off completely [shows source from God cut off]. Our spirits died and went into almost just an inactive state completely. And so we found that we had to get satisfaction for our emotions from somewhere. So we looked out here [shows outside the body], to our friends, to our wives, to the world, to everybody that we could use. And we began to grab attention and affection from them -- through our bodies at times and, at times, just through our emotions. And we began to try to get satisfaction in that way.

So you remember when people say, "I love," today, they really mean, "I need." Indeed some of the songs -- some of the new songs that are coming out -- are at least more honest. They do state that kind of thing. But whenever we say, "I love," we mean, "I need; I want; I require affection; I require attention."

Now that's what we mean when we talk about a carnal nature or a carnal attitude, dear ones. The whole personality has started to work the wrong way around. Instead of working out from the inside like that [shows source from God into the spirit], receiving all we needed from God, we've started to try to get from other people and from the world what we alone can get from God. And so we have become a great world of parasites who are always demanding from one another, and emptying one another of all the love they have.

Now that's what we mean when we talk about a carnal nature. It means -- carnal is 'sarx' in Greek, which is body. It means our whole personality is trying to get all the satisfaction it needs from the body. That's why so many of us eat too much, because we're trying to get satisfaction for insecurity from eating. That's why so many of us spend so much money on clothes, because we're trying to get status from the way we appear to other people, when really we should get it from the confidence we have that our Father accepts us.

So the whole nature has begun to work the wrong way around. That's what we fight against when you find yourself envious of people or jealous, or you find yourself getting into a corner, and crying over the fact that nobody will give you the attention you deserve. The self-pity that we experience, dear ones, is not just one little problem on its own. It's just a symptom of a whole personality that is working in, instead of working out that way [shows movement out from spirit to soul to body on diagram].

Now that's what we've talked about over the past Sundays. What I'd like to share a little today is how this applies to our wills. You remember, for instance, that we have applied this to our minds. And we showed -- I think it was last Sunday or the Sunday before -- how our minds were meant to receive what they required from the intuition of our spirits, and were to pass it on out through our bodies and out into the world.

In that way, we wouldn't have oil spills. We wouldn't have the pollution that we're making of God's world. We'd have a world that was working beautifully, according to his plan. We did the same thing with our emotions, you remember, showing that the love and affection that we need should come from God, through the fellowship in our spirits. It should pass on to our emotions, and our emotions should be used to express that same love and joy to other people. So there is always an outgoing experience.

Would you look with me, just for a few moments now at the will and the conscience? That's what Paul

is dealing with here in Romans 7:16, if you would like to look at it. "Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good."

And loved ones, the will is what determines your action. When your will decides something, you actually do that thing. The will is directly responsible for your action. Now Paul is saying here in Romans 7:16, "Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good." But if he does it loved ones, then his will must be wanting to do it. So he is saying that my will does something that another part of my being does not want to do. That's really a better way to read the verse. "Now if my will does what another part of me does not want, I agree that the law is good".

Now what is that other part? Well, if you look at the diagram, you can see that the part of our spirits that governs our wills is our conscience. [Shows 'Conscience' in the spirit and 'Will' in the soul] And really what Paul is saying is, "If my conscience wants to do what God wants, then even though my will does not do it, yet there's some part of me that is agreeing that God is right and that his law is right."

Loved ones, do you see that just for a moment? Paul is saying, "There are two parts of me that can want things. My will can want things and my conscience can want things. But when I do a thing, it proves what my will really wants, even though there's another part of me that still seems to want something different".

Now that brings home a kind of important truth to us, because you know that a lot of us say, "I really want to get up early in the morning. I really do. I really want to, I really want to." Or we say, "I really want to stop that habit. I really do, believe me I do, but I can't. I want what God wants, but I just can't do it".

Loved ones, I don't know a strong enough word to say, but it's just foolishness, you know. It's just not true. You're not being honest. If your will really wanted to do it, you do it, because that's it. That's what your will is there for. Your will is the determining executive, pivotal factor in your whole personality. If your will really wants to do something, you'll do it. There's no question. And you'd just better face the fact, when you say those pious words, they're really not true. The reason you don't get up in the morning, is because your will doesn't want to get up in the morning. The reason you don't stop that habit that you want to stop, is because your will doesn't want to stop it.

Now you may have another part of you that is wanting. And maybe that's what you mean. Maybe you're saying, "Well I know my will doesn't want to get up, but my conscience does want." But it's not your will. It's the will that is siding with your actions. That's why -- oh there was one fellow called Law who wrote an old book on the devotional life. He said, "When we don't pray, or we don't keep our temper, or we refuse to be industrious, or we are lazy, it's simply because we lack the intention to be otherwise."

Now we're tremendous bluffers, you know. We keep saying, "No, no Pastor, I have really, I have just holy intentions. If you saw my holy intentions, you just wouldn't believe it was the same person." Well, loved ones, I believe if I saw your conscience, it wouldn't be the same person. But do you see your intention determines what you do?

Don't split it up loved ones. Don't accept Satan's lie that your will can be really wanting and you won't do. That's what gives us all a frightening feeling that maybe we're not in control of our

personality, because we kind of think, "Oh, if our will wants to do this, then why are we not doing it?" Well loved ones, it's the truth that your will doesn't want to do it. Your conscience wants to do it, but your will doesn't.

Now this business of conscience, it seems to me is important. The conscience is the part of us inside our spirits that remains more alive than any other part even after our spirits have died. So even people who have dead spirits, even people who aren't Christians at all, who don't know God at all -- still they have a little bit of conscience left. The conscience is the part of us that mirrors God's nature inside us, and makes us know inside what standards He would want us to live up to.

Now the conscience, we all remember, was very weak and sleepy before we were Christians. That's why we often thought of the conscience as the voice inside us that said, "I ought to do this. I ought to do it". The great moral 'I ought', you remember, that Kant [19th century philosopher] talked about it. It's the feeling that I ought to do something. But when God's Spirit comes inside us and strengthens our spirit, then our consciences has become strong themselves. And instead of saying "I ought," they being to say, "I want." And that's how the conscience begins to be transformed into a real desire to do something.

So, most of us who are Christians have two 'wants' inside us. We have the 'want' of our conscience and we have the 'want' of our will. Loved ones, really' God's plan was simple. His plan was that his nature would be revealed to our spirits; that would be expressed through our conscience, and our conscience would rule our wills. That was his plan, that our conscience would rule our wills.

Now in fact, as with every other part of our personality, we've turned the whole operation upside down. 6:00 a.m. or 5:00 or 4:00 a.m., the alarm goes off. And the conscience wants to do what God wants you to do. But for years, your will has been operating, not by the conscience, because you remember your whole spirit was originally dead. And so your will has been dominated for years by what everybody else wants, and especially by what your body wants.

So for years, the body's self-defense mechanism has been transformed into the executive of your life. And the self-defense mechanism has turned into a self-assertion mechanism. And so your conscience says, "Get up, get up, get up," and trying to press through to your will. But your will has been, for years, dominated by your body. And your body says, "Only five minutes more."

Dear ones, do you see it's as hopeless to fight against that as to try to produce electricity by two sticks being rubbed together? The system just isn't made to work that way, because we have deformed the system. We have reversed it completely. And for years, we have trained our wills to be dominated by our body. It's the same with whatever habit it is.

So the conscience tells us, "Okay, you should stop it. You should stop this habit of telling lies." You forget an assignment at work or at school, and the conscience immediately says, "Be open, confess, and face the consequences. Whatever loss of job, or whatever loss of status it means, whatever loss of grade it means, face the consequences. Your Father is in charge. He will reinforce you. He will take care of it." But your will, for years, has been dominated by what your professors think of you, by what your friends think of you, by the physical needs that you have to fulfill with the necessary wages that you have to earn. And your will has simply no chance against that pressure. And you just break down completely. And you tell the old lie again to get out of the difficulty.

Now loved ones, what I am anxious for you to see this morning is, why it happens? Do you see why it happens? It's not just that you haven't a strong enough will. It's not just that the will is a wild maverick that happens to run independently of your whole personality. Brothers and sisters, it's the same problem as with everything else. For years, we've been training our wills and our minds and our emotions to be dominated and dictated to by our bodies and by the world, in general. That's why we have such a problem with the will obeying.

Do you see what needs to be done? You need to change the whole system. That whole miserable, carnal system has to be reversed and turned around so that you can begin to obey, with your will, what your conscience says. And that is just such a massive supernatural task that only God can do it. And that's why we talk about this. That's why we talk about Romans 6:6. That's why we keep saying, "Our old self, our whole self here [shows diagram of personality working the wrong way], the way it used to be, was crucified with Christ. That whole unworkable system, going in like that [shows diagram of personality with arrows from the world outside to the body and to the soul], was crucified with Christ." And what we need is for the Holy Spirit to make that actual and real in our own lives.

Now dear ones, do you see that's why it's not enough to say that you remember Romans 6:11, "Reckon yourselves dead indeed unto self?" It's not enough to say that the way you reckon yourself dead indeed unto self, in connection with your own will is, bit-by-bit to take each area where your will is unwilling, and deal with that area.

Some of us think that, that's why I think some of us think, "Oh dying is kind of a gradual day-by-day business." And we say, "Oh yeah, well if I have to reckon myself dead to my will, all right, the conscience tells me to get up tomorrow morning. Well, I don't get up. Okay, at that moment I have to reckon myself dead. And then I'll be able to get up."

No, loved ones. Don't you see the issue is, "Are you prepared to die to the will being dominated by the body? And are you willing from now on for your will to be governed by your conscience?" That's the death it means. Are you willing to die to letting your body govern your will? Are you willing to die to your body or other people always telling your will what to do? And are you prepared to come alive to letting your will do what your conscience tells you, whatever, whatever the consequences?

Now do you see, that is a big crisis decision to make? In other words, it's not a matter of gradually step-by-step yielding your will on this area, on that area. It's a decision, "Are you going to let your nature work the way God planned it to work?"

Brothers and sisters, I can't give you any idea of the joy and freedom and liberty and single-mindedness that comes once a person settles that issue on the cross with Jesus. Once you settle, "I do not care if I lose friends. I don't care if I lose my job. I don't care if I am known by nobody or if I am another failure, from now on, what my conscience says, I am going to do it." Suddenly, loved ones, you begin to get a sense of immediate life coming from your creator to you. And things in your life begin to fall into place, honestly. When you stop giving your mind and emotions and your body, the right to interfere with what your conscience tells your will to do, then there comes tremendous freedom and single-mindedness.

But you see that's what we do. I mean we're foolish. Our conscience gives us a direction. We don't look to it. We point our will out to what our mind thinks of all this. And by the time our mind has finished modifying the directions of our conscience, and by the time our emotions have made us scared of the consequences of following our conscience, our will hasn't a chance. It just doesn't

look to the conscience at all. It does what the body tells it.

So loved ones, reckoning yourselves dead indeed unto self, in connection with the carnal will, is really a matter of, "Are you willing to die to your right to your will being determined by your body and by other people? And are you willing to put your will under your conscience directly from this day forward?" That's really it.

And you know; you're no fools. You know fine well as you sit there listening to me, what it means for each of you. You know that. You know it will change your life if you ever started that. It would just transform you. You know if you really spoke, when your conscience told you to speak, you know the things you'd suffer. But you also know some of the things that God would be able to do.

Loved ones, your will can be placed directly under your conscience. It really can. Tomorrow morning, when the alarm goes off, you can put your will under your conscience. You can refuse to negotiate; refuse to question; refuse to rationalize. Get the body up out of bed. You can do it, because that's the way God planned for us to operate. And once you are willing to accept that death with Jesus, the Holy Spirit enables you to do that.

Oh you know, on the cross, when the conscience said to Jesus that he should say, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," I mean he didn't pause for a minute. He didn't pause for a moment and let his mind think, "Well, could I get angels and arch angels to come and deliver me from this cross?" He immediately said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

It settles an awful lot of problems, if you do that. I think a lot of you wonder, "Oh is the Christian life really simple and straight forward? I've found it complex and a problem." Loved ones, it's dead simple and really joyful, if you'll simply get the will back under the conscience. Do you believe it? Really it's true. It really works.

So will you begin to think and pray about that in this business of reckoning yourself dead indeed unto self and alive to God in Christ Jesus? Begin to ask the Holy Spirit, "Holy Spirit, in what places in my life am I not willing to put my will under my conscience?" And immediately a lot of them will come to your mind. And then the Holy Spirit will show you the rest.

Oh, I'd get with it you know. I'd get with God and with his plan. It's worth it. The time we spend arguing, itself, brings more frustration than the problems that would come from us obeying our consciences. Let us pray.