

## The Mastery of the Will

Romans 7:19

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Dear ones, will you turn to Romans 7:19? It runs like this, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Even though some of us have read it before, when you read it again it just makes no sense at all when you look at it. "I do not do the good I want but the evil I do not want is what I do." We feel almost at a loss for words if that's the situation. We know the will is the executive in our personalities. When you want to raise your hand, you will your mind to direct the right tendons and the right muscles to lift, and your hand rises.

If you want to write a letter, you will the right message to your mind and your mind directs in deductive detail all the movements that will be required of your body in order to write the letter. It just is very plain and obvious to all of us. If the will can will a thing and yet your body doesn't respond to it or your mind or emotions don't respond to it, then what keeps us from just falling apart completely?

I remember that first time I really saw in my own life that that was the situation. It made me think, "What prevents me from going insane? If I can will a thing but I can't make my mind or my emotions or my body do it, then what control have I over my own life at all?" I think a number of us have probably come to that place in our lives where we wonder just what is going to keep us out of a psyche ward? Are we falling apart completely?

This dislocation between the will that is the executive of our personalities and the rest of our personalities makes us almost like drunken alcoholics all the time. If you think of it loved ones, you have to go on to that conclusion if this is the situation that I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.

Most of us have found ourselves in that situation and we've said, "The problem must be in the will, that's where the problem is, the problem is in the will." And so we've studied the will and experimented with it. We've tried everything to make the will strong and yet we're still in the same trouble. And mind you, the Bible doesn't help us much in our study of the will.

The Bible maintains the will as a mystery. It really does. It seems as if God is determined to preserve the mystery of the will. Jesus will often show us the crucial responsibility that the will has in our lives, but He will never go behind the will to try to show what makes one man will one thing and another man will another.

He will certainly attest to the fact that the will is the executive of the personality. You remember, in John 7:17, He said, "If anyone wills to do the will of My Father, he shall know that what I say is true." So Jesus often gives responsibility to the will and indeed shows that the will is vitally important for any spiritual relationship we have with Him or with His Father. But He never goes behind the will and tries to analyze it and take it apart.

It seems that the greatest miracle God did was to create a being that was capable of making decisions that were utterly independent of what He wanted Himself. That's strange but that seems to be God's greatest miracle. He who was a self-determining being Himself, managed to make other people

that were self-determining themselves. It seems almost as if the most precious thing God wants to preserve in His creation is our free will. So He never goes behind the free will and says, "Oh yes, but this person will always do this and this person will always do that." That's why people like Skinner and the whole teaching of determinism is so absolutely alien to the view of our Creator. Our Creator is careful never to go behind the will. The will is a mystery.

You alone can decide what your will wills. But when you think of it, it doesn't really matter if we can take the will apart or not. That's because the will isn't actually the problem, is it? If you look at Romans 7:19, you can see it isn't the will that is the problem. It isn't the will that is willing the wrong thing.

Romans 7:19, "For I do not do the good I want." You see, you want the good. "But the evil I do not want is what I do." So you do not want the evil. You must admit that's the case with us, after we begin to deal with God at all. It's not that we can't will the good. We can will the good. And it's not that we want the evil. We don't want the evil. But it's something to do with the connection between our good will and the rest of our personalities. That's where the problem lies.

It's something to do with the linkage there. It's something to do with the connection between our wills and our minds and emotions and our bodies. That's what Romans 7:19 is pointing at, "I don't do the good I want." I want the good, but I can't do it. So there's something wrong between the will and the part of our personalities that execute the will's orders.

It's almost as if we're driving a car and we pull the wheel round, but it seems there's something wrong with the linkage between the steering wheel and the front two wheels of the car. Yet dear ones, the truth is the steering linkage is okay. It's not the linkage that is the problem.

The fact is that we are often driving the car, and the will that has the steering wheel, wills to turn in that direction. We begin to turn but there are huge ruts in the road. The front wheels begin to respond to the will, the steering wheel, and then they hit some of those ruts. They spring back into the straight line. Really the problem is somewhere there. The linkage is all right but when the wheels begin to hit those ruts our will seems to weaken and seems to back down.

Before we realized that the Creator of the world was able to give us the life and power of His Holy Spirit, we were more like cars without drivers. In a way we were more like railroad cars. We were drawn on by a power that was greater than ourselves and that we couldn't understand. We found ourselves running along the same rails and the same motives as everybody else in the world.

In other words, we were dragged out by profit, power, and success. We cared only about getting enough food and shelter and clothing for ourselves. We cared only about our ability to dominate others and make them do what we wanted them to do. We cared only about getting satisfaction and happiness for our own feelings. We were really like railroad cars. We went blindly on the way we were dragged, like everybody else in the world.

Ephesians puts it very clearly. Ephesians 2:3 would throw some light on the other metaphor of the automobile. Ephesians 2:3, "Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." That was it.

We were drawn out following the desires of the body and mind. The body needed clothing, food,

shelter, that's what we wanted. The mind needed a sense of satisfaction and bringing others into order if it couldn't bring its own personality into order. The emotions needed the satisfaction of happiness, joy, exhilaration and constant excitement.

We were dragged out and following the desires of mind and body. We couldn't do anything else. Then it was as if we began to realize, that God could put His Son's Spirit inside us and that that Spirit could enable us to fulfill the plan that God had for our lives. We could actually fulfill different individual plans that the Creator had for each one of us and that we needn't all be dragged out on the same things day after day after day.

At that moment, most of us stopped the car of our lives. We asked Jesus to get in beside us. He sat beside us in the passenger seat and we drove off. He began to show us, "You don't need to be dominated by a desire to provide for yourself the physical necessities of life. Those things will be added unto you if you drive this car the way I tell you to. You don't need to be pre-occupied with getting exciting emotional experiences. Those will come if you simply drive the car of your life the way I am going to tell you to do it. You don't need to use your mind to try to knock all the other people off the road. You'll be on the road and will get to your destination (which is different from everybody else's) if you just do what I tell you."

And we began to do what He told us. He would tell us to turn the wheel in this direction and we'd turn it. If you think of the two front wheels as your mind and your body (or your psychological part and your physical part) those wheels came around. Then on one occasion, He said, "Now turn this way." You turned and kept going for a little while but then the mind and emotions rebelled. They seemed to be hitting ruts that they had been in for years. You try to hold tight your will, you try to hold the wheel round, but it snaps back into position. And you found the mind and the body and the emotions going in the old ruts.

Now loved ones, it seems to be that's more of a problem. It's not that the will doesn't hear what Jesus is saying. It's not that the will doesn't hear what the conscience sitting in the passenger seat is saying. It's just that when that conscience directs you to do something that your mind and emotions have rebelled against for years, the ruts take over. Instead of the will, (the steering wheel) directing the front two wheels of the car, the front two wheels of the car direct the steering wheel. Instead of the will being the executive of the personality, the mind and emotions drive the will and make it go whatever way they want.

You come into a situation where you've done something wrong. You've omitted to do a job that somebody gave you to do and you had to do it that day. Or you've made some critical comment about some friend. Suddenly the whole thing is exposed. Your boss finds out you haven't done the job, your friend finds out what you said about him.

At that moment, the conscience steers the will in one direction. But your mind has been used for years to defending yourself and asserting yourself whether you're right or wrong. So your will tries to direct you into open confession, into open apology, into open admission. But that old mind has been used to defending you. It argues this way, "Look, if he find out you didn't do the job, you'll lose the job, and you'll have no money, what will happen?"

Your mind has been used for years to defending yourself from everybody else in the world. So your mind actually catches on one of the ruts in the road. The steering wheel tries to turn it round that way but it will not go and the mind governs the steering wheel. The mind enslaves the will.

You think of your living situation. You've to get a new living situation or you've to get a new job. Or you've to have a new roommate. You know the way the old mind and emotions work. For years, they have been used to arranging all those things to make you happy. That's the biggest thing in life, just to make you happy. Those minds and emotions have been persuading you that the only thing that matters in this world is not the other three and a half billion. They don't feel like you because you're really quite unique. They don't feel like you, they're just property in this world for you to move through and around and manage and manipulate.

Your job is to get a living situation, a job, a friend, a roommate that makes you happy, that's the important thing. The old will listens to the conscience driven by Jesus. And Jesus is being Himself as usual and saying, "Listen, I want you to get the job that is useful to Me. I want you to get the living situation where you can be of most value to Me. I want you not necessarily to go with the roommate that brings you popularity or brings you satisfaction. I want you to go with someone who needs you." The wheel pulls around but the old emotions and the mind, those front wheels, have been in those ruts for years. They strain around with the steering wheel, but then they give up.

Now loved ones you see what's needed. What's really needed is the hand on that steering wheel that is so firm that it will not turn -- a hand on that steering wheel that will not let the wheel swing around. What is needed is the kind of person in that driver's seat that will hold steady when the mind and emotions are reacting in their usual old habitual ruts. In fact, what's needed is for you to stop the car, get out, go around to the passenger door, open it, let Jesus and your dear conscience get out, let them walk around in the front of the car, and get into the driver's seat. Then you sit on the passenger seat and commit yourself to going the way that conscience directs your will, especially at the moment when the mind and emotions, (the front wheels of the car) catch in the old ruts.

Especially when you find yourself coming into a situation where your mind says, "This is ridiculous. If you go this way, your reputation is destroyed. If you go this way, your comfort is destroyed. Nobody gives up their individual rights in this situation." Especially at that moment, you stay seated in the passenger seat and say to your dear conscience, "You go, hold on to that wheel."

The will and the conscience can work together and let the conscience and the Spirit of Jesus control your will and direct it as He wants. Now that's what we call full surrender. Some people call it being baptized with the Holy Spirit. We've called it at times dying to self. It's dying to our right to steer our life the way we want, accepting advice from our conscience and from the Spirit of Jesus. It's dying to that right. It's committing yourself for better for worse, whether it leads you to a crash or whether it leads you to the right destination, it's committing yourself to conscience and the Spirit of Jesus whatever that's going to mean in your life.

Really dear ones, that's the only way to come to the place where you're freed from this paradox that you do not do the good you want, but the very evil that you do not want, that's what you do. The reason is that you keep letting that mind and emotions and that body have their say. You're giving them an executive position in your life that they are not fitted for. The mind and emotions are essentially neutral servants of the will.

The reason we all conform to each other is because they have no individual initiative of their own. They go just the way everybody else goes. As long as you're prepared to follow them, you'll always find yourself in the position, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want, is what I

do." There's only one answer. Either your physical and psychological life are going to be governed by your will, which is in turn, governed directly and irrevocably by your spirit, or you're going to be the toys of your psychological and physical being.

There is only one answer. Get out of the driver's seat and let Jesus get in there. Say, "Lord, I'll go with you wherever, whatever, and I'll keep my hand off the wheel." That's what's involved. In all the discussions we have here on Sunday mornings, that's really what's involved. It's letting Jesus take over completely.

You know yourselves. You're no fools, you know the places where your mind and emotions and your body have been in ruts for years. You know where they are governing your life. You know where you just let your mind wander where it wants to wander. You know where you let your emotions feel what they want to feel. You know where we just do what our bodies feel like doing.

That's why loved ones, we've lost all control of our lives and why we are at the beck and call of almost any feeling that comes across the T.V. screen, or any feeling that comes out of a picture. We're at the beck and call of it because for years we've had no one steering the steering wheel. For years, we've acted like railroad cars.

The important thing is that you think about it and then that you would act on it. The acting is simply, "Lord Jesus, I am willing to be crucified with You. I am willing to die to the control of my own life. I am willing to go whatever way You want. I trust You with the consequences, whether it's bankruptcy or jail. I'll trust You." You'll find it probably isn't bankruptcy and jail. Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, You have made everything in the world. By You, all things were made and without You was not anything made that was made. It is by Your power that the whole universe is sustained and that the stars and planets are kept in their orbits. It is by Your power that the circulation of our blood continues unabated.

Lord Jesus, we have no doubt that You could make a success of our lives. We have no doubt that You know the way our lives should go. You know what You want to do with us. Lord we are just fools pretending to be in control when all we have experienced is being controlled, pretending that we were independent, self-determining beings, when all the time we have been driven by the desires of body and mind.

Lord Jesus we want to be free. We want to start being able to control our lives the way You want. So Lord, we would trust You to show each one of us in what way we need to die with You to these lives of ours and in what way we need to hand them over to You completely and allow You to direct them. We trust You to do this Lord Jesus, so that we may be filled with the Holy Spirit and may come alive for Your glory. Amen.