

Willing Accomplice or Berated Slave?

Romans 7:20

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

The distance between the earth and the sun is just right. If it were any closer, then we would roast to death, and if it were any further, then we would freeze to death. Water is just the right substance to constitute the greater part of our bodies. It can contain 64 different substances without interacting with them chemically at all.

So God has obviously designed everything exactly right and He has done this in making you. He gave each one of us certain abilities that He knew He could use to perfect His world. Some of us here have the ability to develop electric cars and some of us have the ability to create energy from solar and wind power. Others of us have the ability to design buildings and décor that will bring real emotional health and mental stability to people who live in those buildings.

Others of us here have ability to comfort other people and to teach other people. Others of us have ability to keep God's world beautiful in a way that would bring glory to Him. It's the Creator's plan that each of us would follow our ability that He has given to us and use it. In doing that, we would of course find complete satisfaction and a complete sense of fulfillment. He in turn, would recognize us and give us His approval and would also assure us of all the physical needs that we had to have fulfilled and He would meet them. That was His plan.

Now there isn't one of us here this morning who hasn't become conscious of another power that is different from that entirely and yet a power that has certain designs on our abilities. That power grabs hold of us right from the moment we do the S.A.T. test in our junior or senior year.

It intensifies its grip on us as we move from job to job. That power, which is really the power of sin that Paul talks about in this verse this morning, that power says this to us, "Okay, you have certain abilities and you should certainly use them in order to improve the world into which you've been born, but first of all, use them for yourself to earn your own living and to establish your own security. Then, use them to improve the world as best you can." This power has developed a whole atmosphere of self-defense and of competition and of fear among all people in the world. It encourages them to lay the emphasis first on earning their own living, "Use your ability first to do that, first to make sure that you will not want and then after that, perhaps you can use it to improve the world or do all the great things that God intended you to do when He first gave you the ability."

So great numbers of us have been drawn into a position through our desire to earn our own living and to take care of ourselves instead of leaving that in God's hands. Many of us have been drawn into situations where without really intending to, we now find ourselves employed by huge utility monopolies that don't care about developing wind or sun energy at all but are involved totally in denigrating the coal and oil reserves that we have. In doing so they are polluting God's world rather than bringing it into purity and perfection.

We can't help that we are involved in those monopolies. It seems as if, "If you want to earn your living, you have to be involved in them in some way". And so we're often prostituting the abilities that God gave us to develop the energy in His world in a beautiful way, almost deceived into it. I

think you would agree.

It's not that all of us are sitting down here deliberately saying, "I am going to misuse the ability that you've given me, Lord." But we're almost drawn into it because we accept the first lie that you were given your ability to make yourself secure, to defend yourself against all the other millions that want to creep all over you and put you down. You were given your ability to make yourself secure from their actions. Once you believe that lie, you get involved in all the other hideous situations, which end up in the misuse and the abuse of your ability.

So many of us who have been given real ability to comfort others and real ability to heal bodies, accept the lie that we ought to use that ability first to get good paying jobs that will ensure that we'll never want ourselves. Once we accept that lie, we are drawn irrevocably into huge educational and medical institutions that tend to use abilities not primarily to improve the lot of the world -- they do use it partly to do that -- but they use those abilities primarily to establish reputations, primarily to go up the ladder as far as the increments are concerned. We find ourselves drawn into these institutions.

Those of us who can brush floors or who can wash walls find ourselves being drawn into selling ourselves to the highest bidder rather than finding the building where God wants us to use our ability. And so in a subtle way, this power of sin has drawn us all into a misuse and abuse of our abilities. It has become so conventional, so everyday, so normal and usual that even our dear parents encourage us to look at our abilities that way.

Loved ones, it's not only in the dental senior years or the medical senior years where the hypocrisy of wanting to serve mankind is exposed fully. We begin to find -- whether it was for mankind's sake or whether it was for the financial rewards that we went into medicine or dentistry -- it's in all our professions even in those of us who have things that we wouldn't call professions. Those of us who say, "All I can do is wash walls or brush floors", even we are drawn into the same misuse of the ability.

Now loved ones, it's this same power that has misused and drawn us to abuse our abilities. It's this same power that stirs up within us, (as a result of this misuse of our abilities), stirs up within us rivalry, resentment, independence, and a critical attitude towards our fellow workers. It's the same power that stirs up within us anger and irritability and impatience.

It's this same power that stirs up within us discontentment and dissatisfaction. This is the power that Paul talks about in this Romans 7:20. It's the power that we call the power of sin in the world. Now, would you look at the verse dear ones and just let's start with Paul's statement about it in Romans 7:20. This power of sin is obviously so real in all our institutions and is so real in our own personal lives that we have no difficulty attesting to the fact that it seems to have an identity existent quite apart from ourselves, it really does. It seems to be a real power that is separate from ourselves and that's what Paul says in Romans 7:20.

Rom 7:20, "Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin which dwells within me." That's the power of sin, which dwells within me. Loved ones, one of the immediate freedoms that come to us when we really accept what Paul states there about the power of sin, is the freedom from masochism.

If you really read that verse and accept it as God's truth, then you are at last freed from

masochism. Masochism is wanting to beat yourself, to torture yourself. That's what we do until we realize the truth of that verse that the power of sin is something within us that is actually separate from ourselves.

Now until we realize that, every time we lose our temper, every time we get critical of somebody else, every time we fail in trying to keep our thoughts pure and clean, we turn-in on ourselves and we say, "It's my fault. It's my fault that I did that. It's my will, my will isn't strong enough." And we beat ourselves and say we must try harder next time. We must do better next week. We beat ourselves because we are so egotistical that we believe that we could produce all this evil ourselves. And maybe that's the greatest egocentricity that we have.

We actually do believe, "Yes, I am powerful enough to produce all this filth myself." We do believe that and we say, "Yes, it's my fault. It's my fault that I did this." We simply refuse to believe what God says here that, "If I do what I don't want, it's not me that's doing it but it's this power of sin that dwells within me."

Now one of the great freedoms we enter into when we accept the truth of this verse is, we stop beating ourselves. We stop trying to torture ourselves and punish ourselves because we're repeatedly failing to keep our temper. In other words, we really do begin to see that inside, since we received the Spirit of Jesus in us, we do not really want to feel these desires and these strong passions.

Inside us, the Spirit of Jesus doesn't want to get angry. Inside us, the Spirit of Jesus doesn't want to be lustful. Inside, the Spirit of Jesus doesn't want to be resentful. Inside, we really don't want to be like this. But it seems that there's some power that takes hold of our personality and almost against our own wishes makes us feel these things.

Now loved ones, that's the kind of lightening of the load that begins to come into our lives once we begin to set ourselves apart from the power of sin. That's really important. Do you see that Satan's whole job is to get you to confuse his actions with the natural workings of your nature? His whole job is to try to produce strong anger in you and then lay the blame on you and get you to accept it and say, "Yes, I have produced this myself."

Loved ones, one of the reasons that God is willing to forgive us at all is because we did not originate the idea of sin. We didn't. It was this supernatural power that opposed God that originated the idea of sin. That's one of the reasons why God is even able to consider forgiving us. Do you see how wrong we are when we identify ourselves totally with this power of sin? That is Satan's hope and it is his last ditch battle to keep us from setting ourselves apart from this power of sin within us.

Loved ones, you have to do that if you accept God's words here that, the anger and the envy and the jealousy that rise inside you do not originate in your own heart. Now we'll get on a little later to talking about to what extent you agree with those things. That's why I have tried to use the term "willing accomplice" in the title. They don't originate with you and there comes a great freedom from self-torture and self-punishment and self-condemnation when you suddenly accept, "Yes, I am apart from this power of sin. Lord, I did not produce these things. It's this power within me that produced this resentment and I set myself apart from it. I condemn it and I don't condemn myself. I condemn that and Lord I trust you to enable me now to deal with that power." Loved ones, that's the first step.

Another great freedom that comes to us is that we stop trying to fight this supernatural power with human energy. We at last see, "Father, this is a greater power than I have. I have been trying to fight it with my will power and in so doing I have been compounding my previous independence of you. Because here I am, I've agreed and acquiesced in this power and now I am furthering my independence by saying that I am going to destroy this power on my own. Lord, I am going to stop trying to fight it with my own human energy. Father, this is something that demands your supernatural power. Only that can deal with this demonic supernatural energy inside me."

So, that's another great freedom that comes when you really accept that this is a power of sin inside. You stop trying to be egotistical enough to destroy it with your own will power and you start to say, "Father, what I need is deliverance from this. I can't beat it myself with all my willing and with all my clever little psychological games. I need deliverance from this power."

Now some of us carry this truth too far. So we should look at the ways in which we carry it too far to be sure we're not doing it. Some of us carry the truth that it is the power of sin within us that is doing these things too far to the other extreme. We stand with Flip Wilson and say, "Paul, you're dead right. I didn't do this. The Devil made me do it." We get into that whole moral irresponsibility syndrome and say, "Yes, I can't help it. It's not me Lord. It's this power inside me. I just can't help it. It's the devil. He is doing it. I just have to lie here and let him do what he wants."

Now loved ones, there's a truth in God's word that just exposes the fallacy in that. It's in Revelations 3:20 and it's the truth applied first of all to the Spirit of Jesus but really it's a truth that has to be applied to any supernatural power at all. It's the famous verse that probably all of us have heard and quoted at some time or another. It's the Spirit of Jesus speaking and you can see that if you go further back in the chapter that is the Spirit of Jesus speaking to the churches.

Revelations 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me."

We've all heard it expounded that Jesus' Spirit had to stand at the door of our hearts and knock. The handle is on the inside and we have to open it from the inside.

Now the spiritual principle is this -- that not only the Spirit of Jesus but the spirit of Satan cannot get into your heart unless you open the door. It's a basic spiritual principle that no supernatural power can do anything in your life unless you are willing for that power to do it. That's why you can't say, "The devil made me do it." You have to accept that the devil could only make you do it if you were willing to do it.

So it's very important to set yourself apart from the devil. It's very important to set yourself apart from the power of sin. But it's equally important to see that that power has no power over you unless you acquiesce. Loved ones, even puny little you can stand against all the powers of hell if you so choose. No power, good or bad, can do anything in your life or can gain entrance into your spirit unless you accept that power in by your own will.

Now some of us don't carry it as far as, "The devil made me do it", but we say, "I get so obsessed with resentment. At times, I get so possessed by anger and envy that sometimes I just think I am demon possessed." And so some of us carry the truth too far in that direction.

We say, "Yes, the power of sin is the power of sin and I seem to be possessed by that power." And so many of us will go to different meetings asking for people to cast demons out of us because we'll be so obsessed with resentment or with envy or anger or with unclean thoughts that we'll conclude we're demon possessed.

Now there's a plain truth in God's word that should set us free from that if we've received Jesus Spirit and it's 1 John 4:4. It might be good to look at it because I think that's a lie some of us have accepted.

1 John 4:4, "Little children, you are of God." So John is speaking to people who have received Jesus' Spirit into them whether they've died to self or not, they've received Jesus Spirit. "Little children, you are of God and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Now you know from John's other uses of that kind of phraseology that he who is in the world is Satan and the power of sin. What he is saying is the Spirit of Jesus that is inside you is greater than the power of Satan. Now loved ones, no one who has received the Spirit of Jesus, needs in anyway to be possessed by Satan or demon possessed. So you should just settle that and not play around with the idea any longer.

If you do believe you're demon possessed then cast the demon out in Jesus' name and get on with obeying Jesus. Don't fiddle around with the whole idea, "Oh, maybe I am demon possessed, maybe I..." You're not demon-possessed if Jesus is in you. The only reason you're demon possessed is because you are willing to be demon-possessed. So the thing to do is to stop being willing, cast the demon out and get on obeying Jesus. It's not right ever to carry it to the extent that you say, "Oh the power of sin is so powerful within me, Pastor, that I seem to be demon-possessed." No, you're only demon-possessed if you're willing to be demon-possessed.

Now there are some others of us who say, "Yes, I see what you mean. The power of sin is within me. There's that power and there's the power of Jesus. I see it's the carnal nature and the spiritual nature. I have two natures inside me and they're fighting one another all the time." Then you take the next step and you say, "Yes, that's right Paul. It's the power of sin that did that. That was the power of sin. That was my carnal nature. That's the unsafe part of me. Now, the safe part of me, it never sins. So don't worry, I am a schizophrenic. Paul, it's not the carnal bit of me that's going into heaven, it's the good part that's going into heaven."

So, he can never get hold of you at all. You're just slippery. You can slip out from under anything. Loved ones, God's word never talks about us having two natures. God's word often talks about two natures but not two natures in one person. God's word always says, "You're either one nature or the other. You're either spiritual or carnal. You're not two together."

Now you may say, "Oh, but isn't it true brother that the Spirit of Jesus does find there's a power of sin within and fights against that?" Yes, but you're either one nature or the other. It's all you that commits the sin. It's all you that did whatever was wrong. It's all you that told the lie. It's not just a bit of you. Maybe it's good to look at that in 1 Corinthians 3:1. This is the verse that shows that God doesn't divide us up.

You remember there was a preacher who was speaking and one man in the back row started to shout and roar and swear and the preacher asked the ushers to carry him out and they carried him out and then

one person stood up and said, "Pastor, why didn't you cast out the demon from him?" The pastor said, "Well, I couldn't tell the difference between the demon and him so I threw them both out." I think it's important because it emphasizes that God does not make those kind of scholastic or clever little intellectual distinctions, "It was my carnal nature, it wasn't me."

1 Corinthians 3:1, "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ." And remember the King James Version says that's "carnal man". So God makes a clear distinction, you're either spiritual, i.e. you're either fully committed to Jesus and dead to self, or you're carnal and still partially committed to that power of sin. So that's the distinction.

What is the truth then behind Romans 3:20? If you want to avoid those extremes and yet you want to move into God's will according to Romans 3:20, what really is the answer? If we can't deliver ourselves by our own will power and on the other hand we ought not to sit back as these passive people whom we've been discussing and say, "Lord, you deliver me when you choose", then what can we do if the Holy Spirit of God is going to deliver us from this irritability and this anger and this jealousy that we so often face?

Loved ones, the easy answer is cooperate. Cooperate with God. He alone can deliver you from this power of sin but only if you will cooperate with Him, much as you do if you were drowning and the lifeguard was swimming out towards you. When he arrived he would start to tell you how to dispose your arms and your legs, how to lie back in the water, how to relax, and you would simply do what he tells you.

Now, disposing your arms and your legs and your body in a certain way would not actually save you. It would simply enable him to get hold of you so that he could save you from death. Or you go into the dentist office and he or she tells you to open your mouth, don't swallow the gold inlay, breathe this way and breathe that way. Okay you do it. That doesn't actually get the tooth out or get it filled but it enables the person who is dealing with you to do the work.

It's so with the psychiatrist. If you go to him and he tells you to dispose your thoughts or your feelings or your mind in a certain way, that isn't what heals you but it enables him to bring healing to you. So it is with the Father. You can dispose your abilities the way He tells you to. You can stop laying them at the feet of earning your own living first and foremost, of establishing your own security first and foremost.

You can stop laying your ability at the feet of your own self-gratification and self-aggrandizement. You can at least start disposing your abilities at the feet of God. You can at least start saying, "Lord God, You did send me here for a certain purpose. You gave me these abilities because You have a certain plan for Your world. Lord, I lay these at Your feet." You can dispose your abilities in a certain way.

Do you see that the power of sin gains its compelling power and force from the way you're prepared to dispose your abilities? It's because you're prepared to dispose your abilities to look after number one first, that you find yourself drawn into institutions, which in their turn reward you for disposing your abilities in just that way. And so the whole power of sin begins to be multiplied and multiplied ten thousand times.

The whole of 3M (and I am not blaming 3M, because everybody is in the same mess), the whole of 3M is

dedicated first to what all businesses are involved in (all secular businesses) and that is the increase in profit and the increase in turnover. Even though they start to serve humanity, they end up preoccupied with that. And so the whole power of sin is increased because we dispose our abilities in a certain way. Because we do that, we get drawn into institutions which reward people who dispose their abilities that way. They give rewards to those who dispose their abilities in such a way that others will see them, in such a way that it is conspicuous, in such a way that it builds up the reputation of the person in the eyes of his bosses and his colleagues.

So the whole power of sin gains its compelling force from the way we dispose our abilities and so the only way to be delivered from that power of sin is to be prepared to dispose our abilities in the way God intended us in the first place. The truth is this: no supernatural power will come inside you to be a prisoner. It won't. No supernatural power, the power of God or the power of Satan, will come inside your body and your mind and your spirit to be a prisoner. No, no.

Every supernatural power that comes inside you demands the right to dispose your abilities the way it wants to. If it can't do that, it'll leave. It really will. The thing about supernatural powers is they don't have bodies and they need to find bodies in order to exercise their will in this world. So that applies to the Spirit of Jesus but it equally applies to the spirit of Satan.

So loved ones, do you see that the only way to be delivered from this power of sin within us is to be prepared to dispose our abilities and our whole life the way God Himself wanted us to at the very beginning. That's the truth. It is really not much more complex than that.

Are you prepared to dispose your abilities the way Jesus did on the Cross? Are you prepared to take your position on the Cross with Jesus, the way He did in regard to His ability? Are you prepared to dispose and lay out your ability, the way the Spirit of Jesus wants them laid out? I know there are lots of young husbands and wives here. I know we're all fighting the same thing in that we're just at the beginning of the career and the beginning of life together. But loved ones, you're no fools. You know the way society teaches us to do it and the way society has taught us to capitalize on those abilities. It's not for society and it's good at the end of the day. It's for our good. And so we end up consuming each other and destroying the very society of which we're part.

Loved ones, Romans 7:20, "If I do what I do not want, but I do the very evil that I do not want, (instead of doing the good that I wanted to), then it's no longer I that do it, but it's the power of sin that dwells within me." But I have to add, only if you're willing, only if you're willing for that power of sin to do that inside you. If you once become unwilling for that power of sin to do those things with your life then Jesus is able to come in and replace that power of sin with His own Spirit and begin to draw out your life as He first intended it to be lived.

Some of you may be sitting there and saying, "Well, do you want me to leave my job at 3M?" No, you don't do that, but you start dealing with God about this. You start saying, "Holy Spirit, I am willing to leave 3M if you want me to."

It's probably not a question of leaving 3M at the end of the day. It's probably a question of, "Are you willing to start disposing your abilities as God wants?" Then, He'll start leading your possibilities. You don't move negatively until God has shown you some positive place to go into.

But loved ones, He cannot show you a positive place that He has had for you from the beginning of the world until He knows you're prepared to dispose your abilities that way. When you are, He'll show you and then you'll be willing to take the steps. I think this is the heart of being delivered

from the power of sin, so you can at last do what you want to do and avoid the evil that you want to avoid.