

The Inner Conflict

Romans 7:21

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

For the past six months many of us here have been studying Romans 7 which is the greatest chapter in all of literature that deals with the greatest personal problem that we men and women have and that's a big claim but I think you'll see that it's true if you'd look at the statement that Romans 7 gives of that problem and it's Romans 7:19.

Romans 7:19, "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." I don't think there's any one of us that wouldn't relate to that and say, "Yes, that's right. It's just moral impotence -- the inability to do what we know is right and the inability to stop doing the things that we know are wrong."

Old Dostoevsky calls it the moral perversity of mankind or the streak of irrationality that seems to run through every man and woman. You remember Robert Louis Stevenson really immortalized it in the homicidal maniac Mr. Hyde that kept bursting through the outwardly respectable Dr. Jekyll. All of us can see very much the presence of two beings inside ourselves at different times.

Many people for years have thought it fashionable to say that the greatest problem of us men and women is guilt. You remember C. J. Young the psychologist said that. He said that man's greatest problem is the problem of guilt in the 20th century. But I think many of us have discovered that there is a deeper problem than that problem of guilt because many of us came into a place where we realized we had guilt and we at last saw that the whole purpose of Jesus' death was to deal with that guilt.

We began to realize that we could be freed from that guilt through a realization that God regarded Jesus' death as ours. And so we came free from that guilt at that time and many of us came into that. But when we began to see that the removal of guilt, in the light of Jesus' death, was conditional upon another attitude and action and behavior of ourselves, we began to discover that that condition often stole from us the deliverance from guilt. Maybe you'd like to look at that condition, it's 1 John 1:7. It's because of this that I think you'll agree that there is a problem that is deeper than guilt itself.

1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." Many of us realized that we were guilty and we saw with joy that God removed that guilt the moment we really believed that God regarded Jesus' death as ours. But then we began to realize that the blood of Jesus would only cleanse us if we walked in the light. That's where we began to come into experiential difficulty. We were glad to accept that Jesus had died for us and we were delighted to find that God regarded Jesus' death as ours and therefore forgave us our sin.

But then we began to try to walk in the light that God gave us. We walked for a while in that light successfully. But bit-by-bit, the Holy Spirit would show us different areas of our life where we were still walking in lust, where we were still walking in resentment, areas of our life where we were still wanting our own way and rebelling against God. The more we struggled to walk in that light, the more we found it was impossible to walk in that light. As we failed to walk in the light

we began to doubt whether Jesus' death and blood was cleansing us from our sin.

Indeed many of us, as you know, began then to try to rationalize the sin and to say, "Well, it's not really sin for me", or to try to justify the sin by saying, "Oh, it's just a human weakness that is common to all of mankind." But the more we did that the more difficulty we had pretending that we were walking in the light. Eventually we came to the place where we saw that this moral impotence in our life was stealing from us any freedom from guilt that we had entered into.

I am sure there must be about six or seven hundred of us here and I am sure maybe 400 of us are in that miserable experience. We're hanging on to the idea, "Yes, Jesus died for us and God regards His death as ours so He doesn't want to crucify us again." We know that, and every time we hang on to that, God gloriously forgives us. But now we begin to find we're having difficulty walking in the light.

"Yes, but He has shown me this sin a thousand times. A thousand times I've tried to keep my temper but I am just not walking in the light. Can God still forgive me again and again?" Of course He can, as long as we're willing to confess. The problem is, there comes a time in our own lives where we stop confessing the sin and we say, "Oh no, I just have a more fiery kind of nature than other people. Oh no, my body is just a still more sensitive and I am just over sexed, that's it. I am over sexed. Other people just don't have the same problems as me so, oh no doubt it isn't a sin for me." That's the danger, loved ones.

The danger isn't that God won't forgive you. God will always forgive us as long as we see it continually a sin and reject it and confess it and seek again to obey God. But the danger is that we slowly, subtly begin to rationalize it and justify it, and then guilt begins to settle in upon us again.

What we have seen over these six months therefore is that you really have to deal with that moral impotence that has a habit of creating new guilt in you every day, that's what we have to do. We have to deal with that failure to walk in the light that God is giving us because it's that failure that keeps bringing new guilt upon us day after day and week after week.

So many of us have seen that if God regards Jesus' death as our death and is therefore able to forgive us for our sins, then we ought to be prepared to regard Jesus' death as our death also so that we can be delivered from this moral impotence in our lives, so that we can be delivered from this old self inside us that keeps wanting its own way.

I think you will probably say what hundreds of us have said, "Why such a radical remedy? Why do we have to come into a death by faith with Jesus? I thought Jesus died so that I wouldn't have to die. Why do I have to come into a death with Him? Why such a radical remedy for a little thing like losing my temper? What is the old self anyway? What is this inner conflict that Paul talks about in Romans 7:21?" Maybe it would be good to look at the verse so that we know. It's the verse we're studying today.

Romans 7:21, "So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand." Many of us have wondered, "But why is it so? Why am I like that?" What we have been saying is that the problem is greater than just losing your temper. We're like that for greater reasons than just because we have a fiery disposition. We're like that for greater reasons than just because you haven't got enough control of your irritability or your impatience. We're like that because there's

been a radical reversal of our whole personality from the plan that God originally had for it. If the rest of us would just suffer these miserable old diagrams, I think I'll go with them just for the sake of those who maybe are here for the first time.

God had a certain plan for the way our personalities would work. The tragedy really is that they're not working that way any longer and that even for those of us who receive Jesus' Spirit into ourselves and receive God's forgiveness, most of us have our personality still working in this old reverse perverted way and this is what the Bible means when it calls us carnal.

The Bible means (by carnal) not just that you're sinful or you're thinking of sex all the time or you're losing your temper all the time. The Bible means your whole personality is turned upside down. You're working the wrong way around. That's why such a radical remedy is required as destroying that whole personality and renewing it completely because the whole thing is operating the wrong way around. We could start this way dear ones, just by reminding you of the whole arrangement that the Bible says is God's creation of our personalities. There's a verse in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 that talks about the spirit and the soul and the body.

In other words, God made us like Himself -- a trinity with a spirit and a soul and a body. If you begin to follow through the spirit in the Old and New Testament, you find that the spirit has many different capabilities. Three of the most important are the ability to commune with God, the ability to know what God is thinking through intuition, and the ability to judge whether we're acting according to that intuition through our conscience.

So over these six months we've been studying this and we've seen that those really are some of the basic functions of the spirit. There are many other functions. As you follow through the soul, the 'Psoche' (in Greek) or 'Nephesh' (in Hebrew), in the Old and New Testaments, you begin to find that the soul has different functions also. One of its functions is the volitional function. It is able to will to do certain things.

Another function it has is to think. You'll find that when you follow up verses that refer to the soul in the Old Testament, it either refers to the soul thinking or meditating or the soul willing or determining or the soul feeling or desiring. So we have found that is God's plan for the personality.

Now loved ones, I am sure when we get to heaven, we'll laugh at this corny diagram and say, "Oh, we saw through a glass darkly. We didn't even see through the glass." I am with you. This is just a pitiful attempt to say some of the things that the Father is saying in the word of God. But it does seem that that is the kind of arrangement that exists in our personality. I tried to defend myself against dividing up the personality. I am with you that it's all one personality. It's not separate entities. None of us, who are surgeons here, can take out the soul and say one soul. Okay, I agree. It's one personality but it does seem that we exist at these different levels.

Now loved ones, here was God's plan for us. His plan was that in communion with Him in prayer, we would begin to receive through the Holy Spirit, (who is the life of God); we would begin to receive through communion, His plans for the universe. We would recognize and understand those plans through the intuition of our spirit as against working it out by trial and error (for those who are scientists and technicians among us), as against the idea of, "Is there water here?" or "Is there oil when we sink a drill down?" When it sprouts up we say, "Yes, that's oil."

As opposed to that "trial and error" method that we use in science and technology, we receive it (God's plans) by intuition through the Holy Spirit. Our conscience would then constrain our will to exercise themselves so that the mind would be activated and would begin to work out the deductive details of that guidance that God was giving us.

So for instance, in communion with God, we would receive through the Holy Spirit coming into our spirit, we would receive God's direction presumably about wind energy and solar energy and geothermal energy. We would probably receive guidance about the preferences of fission over fusion and details of how we could best develop energy here in our world.

Then it was God's plan that our consciences would constrain our wills to direct our minds to work out the details of that, to build the necessary equipment to make use of the energy from the sun, to make use of the energy from the winds, the energy from geothermal sources. In that way, we would end up filling the earth with energy that could not run out.

Our emotions would receive utter satisfaction from doing what they knew the body was meant to do. The body would be utterly fulfilled. We would all have a great sense of our identity and a great sense of the Creator's approval upon us. We would feel in every way that we're being used by Him to fill the world with latent energy that He had placed in it and in that sense, to further develop the universe that He had created. Presumably, if we had kept going that way, by now we would be having vacations on Mars and going to the moon for Christmas.

As soon as we began to work independently of the Holy Spirit of God (or of His life), our whole spirit died. At least they went into a deep sleep so that we were no longer aware of the Creator at all. We began to live as if there was no Creator. Then we started trying to get what we needed from the world and the other people in it what we would otherwise have got from God. We began to look at the world itself and to decide, "Well, we must get what we need for ourselves." No longer was it, "Father, what do You want to do for Your world?"

Instead it was very much us in the center of the picture feeling the cold of our own bodies and saying, "How do I get something to warm my body? Where will I get some heat?"

So we began to flail away at the trees and we mowed the forest down mile after mile. We stripped Minnesota of all its forests at one time. We finished with the forest and then we began to go into the coal. We stripped the coal out of the mines. We stripped it anyway we could. By that time we were so concerned with ourselves that we didn't care whether people lost their lives in the coalmines while they were doing it. We didn't care who suffered to get us the coal. We wanted energy and we wanted it our way. We began to exploit not only the world itself but also our brothers and sisters to get what we needed for ourselves.

Of course because we were working with just the guesswork of our own mind, we were making mistakes hand-over-fist. We were taking the coal and the oil out of the earth and never considering what would hold the rest of the earth up on top. And so the poor souls in Houston fight for their houses that are sinking as we take more and more oil and coal out from underneath them. Then we began to move into the oil. What we ended up doing as the oil, the irreplaceable fossil fuels, got less and less was to get more and more concerned about ourselves. Instead of finding a surplus and fullness of energy, we began to find that we were scrambling to grab the little bit of energy that was available for ourselves.

So in the Middle East, we're prepared to trample over anybody in order to maintain ourselves at the

top of the heap. The incredible thing is loved ones, that not only has our personality started to work back this way but we find that we are lacking satisfaction even as we do all this. We can never get enough energy for one thing. But for another thing we're having all kinds of guilt complexes and problems with our own identity because we're not fulfilling the commission that God gave to us to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

We're multiplying all right but we're emptying the earth. We're concentrating on trying to empty it in our direction. Really our whole personalities have started to work backwards. We concentrate now not as princes and princesses of God in receiving from Him directions as to how to share and distribute His largess and generosity to everybody else -- we are miserable little beggars who are scrambling to make sure that we empty the resources in our direction whatever happens to everybody else.

Loved ones, the really important thing to see is not the individual facts in that whole presentation but the important thing to see is that our personalities have got used to working back that way. Loved ones, that's what the Bible means when it says we're carnal. It means that our whole personality instead of working outwards from God to the world has started to work inwards. We now draw from people and from the world to please and satisfy ourselves. That's what you're up against with bad temper or irritability.

It's as if you receive Jesus into yourself and you start walking manfully and courageously up the sewer pipe. You're walking up there and you're going to walk this way and somebody opens the sewerage gate. The whole mess comes down and you're walking against the irritability, the anger, and the selfishness. Really it's like that.

The whole thing is tipped the wrong way and you're walking uphill all the time. Unless you allow God to deal with that whole wrong direction in your personality, you can never make any headway. To tie it down to ourselves, (because we don't all own oil wells) we're facing exams. In our own spirits with Jesus there, we want to use those exams to test our understanding of the subject, we really do. We know that's why the exams are there. We want really to do that and at the beginning that's what we intend to do. But our whole personality has got used to depending on our peers and on our professors for approval and respect and recognition.

Moreover, our whole personality has got accustomed to thinking that the job that we eventually get is utterly dependent on the opinion of our professor or the opinion of our peers and is not dependent on the God of the universe. And so, our whole personality is bent the other direction. The examination papers become available in the fraternity or a friend gets hold of them in a dormitory before the exam and we cheat like the rest. We do it because our whole personality is working the wrong way around.

We're not looking to God for everything we need, for the wisdom that we need, for the approval that we need and for direction in life. We're looking all the time to each other and to the outside world. In other words, we sin because we're carnal. You have difficulty with bad temper and pride and selfish ambitions because we're carnal. Our whole personality is moving the wrong way.

Loved ones, do you see that happens with even those of us who are Christians. We have a double problem. Before we're Christians we're working one way and that's it. We're just working that way. We don't even know we're sinners. We're just happy in our ignorance. Ignorance is bliss in that sense. But then we receive Jesus into our spirit. Our spirit comes alive and He begins to try to

move out. He meets the old sewer, loosing right down the pipe. There's that inner conflict inside and we find ourselves in the middle of Romans 7:21, "I find it to be a law that when I want to do good, evil lies close at hand." Yes, because it's pouring right down upon me from the rest of my personality.

So dear ones, what we have been saying is, it's really not enough just to receive Jesus' Spirit into you and to come alive. You have to allow Him to deal with that whole personality direction. That takes a miracle to change that. That's why God has told us repeatedly, "Before you can really be fully born again as a new creation, you have to allow me to deal completely with that old creation. The way I have done it is to put you into My Son Jesus and to destroy you there. That whole personality direction of yours has been crucified with My Son and if you're willing in every detail to let it happen inside you, I'll actualize it in your present life by filling you with my Holy Spirit." That's really the answer, loved ones.

It's not just a case of God regarding Jesus' death as our death. Sooner or later, you and I have to do the same. Sooner or later, if you and I want to be free from this reverse personality that we have, we have to be prepared to die with Jesus. That's really it and that's the way to move into it.

Just ask the Holy Spirit. "Holy Spirit, I don't know what dying with Jesus means. I really don't, but will you show me some of what it means? I can see that Jesus didn't look to the crowd for approval. I can see that He had an approval from somebody else. If I am looking to my peers or to my parents or my professors for approval and acceptance and recognition, will You show me that? I want to die to that. I want to be finished with that. Okay, if He didn't keep looking to his job and to his employers as the source of all the money that he needed, all right, maybe I am doing that. I know it's right for me to work but it's not right for me to be slavishly dependent as if they alone had the power of life and death over me. All right, if I am doing that, will You show me?"

Loved ones, walking in the light is taking each area of your personality and step-by-step getting it onto the Cross with Jesus until there comes a beautiful day when you know that everything is on that Cross. The Holy Spirit is able to reverse the whole personality and put it into the pattern and the attitude that God had for it at the beginning. Suddenly life begins to flow beautifully.

I think a really important thing to see as you ask God to bring you into this, is that you may be in doubt about whether Jesus' death is your death, but God isn't. So don't get under lots of condemnation about it. It will be hard going for a while if you really take it seriously this morning. If you ask God to start working on you you'll almost be sorry you asked. You'll get harder and harder to live with and the Father will allow more and more of your irritability, your sarcasm to come out until you see this miserable old self for what it is. It's not just a little bitty thing that needs to be adjusted a little. It's a massive monster that has to be destroyed.

It's very important as you come into that to see that God still regards you as having died with Jesus. He isn't condemning you. It's not right for you to condemn yourself in the sense that you doubt whether God is accepting you or not. God is accepting you. God regards your death as Jesus' death and Jesus' death as your death. He is just saying, "If you'll only do the same thing, you'll not only have my acceptance but you'll have freedom inside your own personal life."

So loved ones, that's what we've been talking about. I thought it was important to attempt to summarize it for those of you who are just back from vacation. We can all start together next week.

We're coming to the end of the chapter so you don't have many days to get free [chuckle] - no you do. So is there any question? Okay, shall we pray?

Dear Father, we do begin to see the massiveness of the problem. We feel Lord that part of our difficulty has been underrated, the radical nature of the disease that is inside us. Lord we see that, it's just like that sewer pipe that is angled in a certain direction. It doesn't matter what we do, it's still going to flow in that direction until somebody bigger than us takes the whole thing, destroys it and re-builds it.

Father, we want that in our own lives. If that's what Jesus' death brought for us, even if we don't understand all the detail, that's what we want in our own lives. If that's Your plan for us Father, that's the way we want to go. We trust You through the Holy Spirit to begin to deal with each one of us now in this coming week and bring us to the place where we're ready to die by faith with Jesus our Savior and to have that old selfish self removed and find in its place the Spirit of Jesus Your Son. We ask that so we can begin to flow out, as You wanted us to at the beginning. We want to begin to beautify Your world and fill it instead of emptying it. We want to stop being parasites on each other. Father we trust You for wisdom and guidance as we move into Your plan for us. For Your glory. Amen.