

## Personality or Spirit Prayers?

Romans 8:27b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

It's really very difficult for each one of us in this auditorium, to realize that our personality is the only one like it in the whole world. It's really very difficult loved ones because our mass society tries to emphasize the things we have in common with others, and the similarities we have with others or to others. And our present psychological theories tend to stress how we are dominated and dictated by our environment and our heredity. And so it's quite difficult for us all to really take this honestly and truly that there is nobody like you. There is not, loved ones. There is no one just like you, in the whole world. You have a combination of shyness and drive that nobody else has. You have a combination of humor and seriousness that nobody else has. And God deliberately made you that way. You're unique. And it's very hard I think for many of us to realize that. And we kind of hear it up here in our heads, but not down here in our hearts, and we get back to, "Well everybody uses Alberto VO5 shampoo so I'm a consumer. Yeah, I get Alberto VO5, same as everybody else."

But loved ones really that's not true. The truth is that you're different from everybody else in the whole world, you really are. And you know too, that the effect that you have on the other people with your personality depends to a great extent on the motives behind your personality. For instance, you have a gift of humor that can be used in sarcasm to cut somebody down to size like that, if the motive behind the humor is your exultation. But your humor can really put somebody else at ease in a conversation if you just use it for making fun.

And it's the same with shyness. Shyness is a real disadvantage, it's a real debilitating thing. It's something that really cuts down and limits the possibilities of your being any use in society if it is built primarily on your feeling that you're not as good as you want to be and you'd really like to be better than you are and you'd really like to be better than other people and so you don't want them to see how bad you are so you keep shy and quiet so that they won't realize how incompetent you are. If shyness is built on that, then shyness itself is a disadvantage. But, if you yourself are really secure in your own status with your Maker then humility is something that is beautiful. It's something that wants to put the other people forward in conversation, it's something that wants to build the other person up. So your personality is unique but it can bring about tremendously different results depending on the motive that governs your personality.

It's the same with the life energy that runs through your personality. If the life energy that runs through your personality is your desire to live your life independent of everybody else and make yourself successful at all costs, then that affects everybody else in the world. But if the life energy of God's own spirit of love and peace runs through your personality, then it touches the humor, and the shyness, and the drive, and the gentleness, and it touches them all into life that enables you to transmit the life of God's love and peace to other people. It really makes everything beautiful.

As you think of a lake and you think of the sunlight on that lake early in the morning or at sunset time. And it just touches the lake and the water just becomes gold or it becomes silver in the morning. And it seems that the sunlight just transforms everything else. Or you look at a snow bank and the sun hits it and it bursts into glistening light. Now that's the same thing that can happen

to your personality. Your personality can be touched into gold and life and brightness and light if the life of God's spirit is running through it.

And you remember we said that if you're not willing to let the life of God's spirit take over your personality and you in fact determine to use your personality for your own benefit and not for his benefit or his glory at all, then that is what the Bible calls a sin unto death. That is a resistance against the Holy Spirit of God's life that will eventually bring you into darkness and despair yourself and eventually into eternal destruction. Because God cannot let a wild personality run through his universe doing whatever it wants, destroying wherever it wants. And so if you reject the right of God's spirit to run through your personality and to transmit itself to others, then you commit a sin unto death. And you'll remember we said it produces works of the flesh. It produces anger, and you get angry because things aren't going your way. When God's life is running through your life it seems to flow beautifully. But when it's not running through your life you get angry, you get envious, you get jealous, you get irritable, you get impatient. Those works of the flesh come from a rejection on your part of the life of God's spirit, a resistance to his Spirit using your personality at all.

Do you remember the last day we said, that once you've accepted God's plan, and you said, "Lord, I know you want to pour your life through my personality. I know that's why I have it." Then that Spirit of life begins to try to discipline your personality. And some things it doesn't manage to discipline and some things it does and some things you haven't got light about yet. Some of us still talk too much. Some of us are facetious; we're funny at the wrong time. And some of us are still harsh with our wives or with our roommates. And the Holy Spirit has not yet been able to give us light about those things. Now those are sins not unto death, you see? Those are personality traits. They are inexpedient traits that prevent the life of God's Spirit getting through to other people. They aren't willful things. We've accepted, "Lord this is the principle that you have for our lives: to let your life flow through us to others, and we're willing to do that but there's some things that we haven't seen yet that you want to change in us."

You're still doing them. They're sins not unto death. Because they are not deliberate resistances to God's will -- they're simply blindness as to the way in which the Holy Spirit wants to transform and renew your personality. And so loved ones last day, I think you remember, we talked about those two. We talked about sins unto death, works of the flesh, anger, envy, jealousy. We talked on this side about sins not unto death: inexpedient human traits, inexpedient personality habits that you've got used to for years but really there is no iron in them. They're there and you simply don't know yet that they're wrong. The one is voluntary, the other is involuntary. The one is a case of rebellion against God's will, "I don't want your Spirit running through my life." The other is deception, "I don't know that your Holy Spirit wants to change me in this way yet." The one brings eternal death; the other brings a sense that you're not ministering life. This one when you're free from it you become a child of God; this one when you become free of it you become a minister of God's life. This one is concerned with the end in view -- you have a wrong end view, a wrong motive. You're living for your own self instead of for God. This other one you're using the wrong means to obtain the right end. You want to live for God but you're using the wrong means to attain it.

Jesus said, "I'm going to have to die, I'm going to have to go to the cross and die." Peter loved Jesus with all his heart and he wanted the best for Jesus. His motive was right, he wanted himself to live for Jesus, but the means were wrong. He said, "Be it far from you Lord. Don't let that happen to you." And Jesus turned around and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Not because Peter

was after the same thing as Satan, the elevation of self, but because Peter was using Satan's methods of avoiding danger at all costs in order to try to bring about the right end. So loved ones, that's it.

Now you can see that even though it was using the wrong means to bring about the right end, the means in a way would have perverted the end. You can see that. If Jesus had accepted Peter's recommendation and had decided, "Yeah, I'd better avoid the cross at all costs," we would presumably not be here today. And so using the wrong means -- while you can say it is just an inexpedient trait of our personalities -- it can result in dreadful disappointments and defeats in other people's lives. Loved ones, I really think a lot of people would probably be alive to Jesus if you and I had allowed our personalities to be more disciplined by his Holy Spirit.

I think of about a 100 times when I believe honestly that I would've been prepared to listen to the real gospel if it had not been spoken by someone whose personality was full of don'ts: "You don't smoke, you don't drink, you don't dance, you don't go to the theater." And it came over to me as a negative, negative thing. And so when they shared the gospel with me I felt, "Oh I don't want to go into that kind of a negative life." And I think it's true of many of you. So I don't think it is enough to say, "Well Pastor then, as long as our motive is right that's all that matters." Loved ones, no, I think the means is important in order to obtain the right end.

Now of course God has brought us down to this in a specific example and that's what I'd like us to look at today, it's Romans 8:27, it is in regard to prayer. In other words some of us can really miss out on God's answers to our prayers, simply because we have not yet allowed our personalities to be disciplined by his Holy Spirit. Romans 8:27 loved ones, "And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." And just look at the previous verse, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness." King James Version says. "In our infirmities," you remember, and we would say, "In our personality weaknesses." Likewise the Spirit helps us in our personality weaknesses; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words."

In other words, God says the Spirit is always trying to pray through us despite our personality weaknesses. And yet often we prevent him praying the way he wants to, because of our personality weaknesses. And, of course, he always prays right. That's why Romans 8:27 reads, "And he who searches the hearts of men, knows what is the mind of the Spirit." God looks down, knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." And I think I will be able to make sense of it in a moment.

What's the key to prayer? What's the key to answered prayer? I'll show it to you in Ezekiel 36:37. It's an important verse. "Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their men like a flock." Now would you just look at it again? "Thus says the Lord GOD: This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them: to increase their men like a flock." Now you almost feel like saying, "If you know what to do, why don't you do it? I mean Lord why do you say, 'This also I will let the house of Israel ask me to do for them to increase their men like a flock.'? If you know that's what they need, they've been decimated by this exile and they need to be increased in their numbers, why don't you just do it?"

Now loved ones, the principle of prayer is that. That God always requires some free will human agent here on earth to know what he wants to do and to ask him to do it before he is able to do it.

Now that's incredible, that the infinite God should be so tied to you and me as that. But he is, loved ones. You who are theologians or philosophers at all, you know that the whole plan of salvation is based on one principle: the preservation of our free wills and the creating of a family of freewill agents who will love because they want to love. Now do you see it is the same with prayer? Loved ones, God could see what every one of you needs here this morning and he could if he were not of the nature that he is, he could come down and answer all those things immediately. And do you see what that would make of us? It would make of us puppets, marionettes. He would come down wherever he saw something going wrong, and he would fix it. Wherever he saw someone about to go the wrong way, he would just change it. And all we ourselves would become would be puppets or robots.

Now the Father has determined that though he can see what each of us needs, he is not free to do it unless one of us freewill agents ask him to do it. He cannot intervene without us asking him to. In other words, the key to prayer is kind of twofold. First of all, God will not act against his own will. He won't act against his own will. Now that is in I John 5:14. God won't act against his own will. It's part of what we read. "And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us." In other words, God can only hear if we ask something that is according to his will. So he will not act against his own will.

But the second part of the key to prayer is, he will not act apart from our wills. So he cannot act against his own will, but he will not act apart from our wills. Now that's in Matthew 9:29. "Then he touched their eyes, saying, 'According to your faith be it done to you.'" Or the King James Version you remember is, "Be it unto you according to your faith." In other words, it will be to you according to what you believe and expect.

Now I think that's the conundrum that we all face, that God cannot act against his own will, but he will not act apart from our wills. So how do we solve it? Well some of us don't solve it at all. We add that little magical end to the prayer that makes it no prayer at all, "If it is your will. Whatever you want. I haven't a clue but whatever you want." Loved ones, it's not a prayer at all. Truly, really it isn't. It's very different, the sense in which Jesus used that. And many of us pray that way.

Others of us decide, "Well what's his will? Well I don't know." And we use the old soul, our minds and emotions, and we look around and we say, "Yeah well I think... Yeah okay, Lord do this." Well maybe that's not his will so I will throw up another one. And we just keep throwing them up. And we threw up so many that, sometimes by sheer chance, we hit on what God wanted to do and then -- you must admit kind of half-heartedly, because we have a fair idea that this might be coincidence -- and half-heartedly we say, "Ah, God answered my prayer." Well you threw up so many that you were almost bound to get one answer, about the same situation. You know, I know that we can throw up many prayers about different things, but I think you'll agree loved ones, that we come to a problem situation when we hurl those things up to our Father as if it was just the volume of the prayers that he would hear. It's mad, it's really mad.

It's like me saying to my wife, "Love, let's go and we'll buy our Christmas presents." And then me saying to her, "Now don't tell me, don't tell me what you want," and then I take her down to the basement at Dayton's and I start there. "Okay, would you like a pair of snow shoes?", "No." "Okay. Would you like some wooly socks?" "No." "Okay." Then up, up to the book section, "Would you like Martin Luther's works? Would you like a camera, a Polaroid camera?" And I just go on, "Would you like this? Would you like this? Would you like that? Would you like that?" Apart from the fact

that we'd never get it completed before Christmas, it is a dumb way to find out what she would like for Christmas.

But loved ones, that's what we do with our prayers. We keep on hurling different prayers up hoping that some time we might hit the one that God wants to answer. And you know the answer to it. I should get together with my dear one and I should say, "Love, what would you like for Christmas?" Or I should observe the things that she has admired during the past year. Or I should use my knowledge of her over the years and knowing the kind of things that she enjoys doing. And then I buy her something because I've heard it from her own lips or I've read her own mind. Now, loved ones, that's God's will for us. Not to keep throwing up soulish prayers, not to keep looking around and seeing what you think God ought to do in your home or your family, but instead to allow the spirit of God to begin to draw you close to the Father, to worship the Father, to love him, to spend time in his presence until the Spirit of God within you begins to give you a sense of what God wants to do in your family.

Do you see loved ones that our great minds are so arrogant that they are full of all kinds of convictions of what God should do in our family, "Well, Lord, you'd better deal with my brother. Father, obviously, my father is the alcoholic, that's the first one you should deal with." And loved ones, maybe that isn't God's order at all. The Father can look down on every one of our situations and knows exactly what he wants to do in that situation, but he cannot do it until you ask him to do it. That's it. His hands are tied by the principles in Ezekiel 36:37. His hands are tied until some little fly here on this earth discovers what God wants to do and asks him to do it and then knows that he is heard. And then God is free to act.

Loved ones, that's the principle that goes on right through all the Old Testament. I'll just show you maybe one example of it if you would look at it, it's Exodus 14:15-16. The Israelites arrive at the Red Sea and the Egyptian army is behind them, "The LORD said to Moses, 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of this Israel to go forward. Lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go on dry ground through the sea.'"

God saw them. He knew what he intended to do. He told Moses what he should do and it was done. Moses didn't get to the Red Sea and it roaring against them and start crying and praying all kinds of prayers. But God told him what he was going to do and then Moses went forward and did it.

It's the same with Jericho. God explained to Joshua what he was to do, he got to Jericho and went round the walls; the walls fell flat. God can always see what needs to be done in each situation and he has already all the angels and archangels and all the power of the Holy Spirit marshaled and ready to release into the situation and it all waits upon your word, loved ones. It all waits upon you receiving through the Holy Spirit what God wants to do in a situation. I'm just encouraging not only the mums, -- because I don't think you're the only ones that do it -- but those of us who love our roommates and love our friends -- would you stop being governed by your human, soulish personalities, sympathies, and ideas as to what you think it would be a good idea for God to do? And would you get together with the Father? And would you begin to sense from him what he wants to do so that your prayers will begin to be an outflow of your worship and your fellowship with the Father instead of some kind of emergency operation by which you try to pull the thing out of the mess it's in.

In other words, really, there's one verse that states this and it's I Kings 19:11. You remember it's Elijah. "And God said, 'Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.' And behold, the LORD

passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD." That's the immediate emergency that has taken place. The son or daughter has run away from home, your roommate has just decided she's going to leave and you are left with all the rent to pay.

"And a strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind." That wasn't the right prayer to pray, "Lord keep her from moving." Or, "Lord keep her here at home." "But the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake..." That's the earthquake of your own ideas of what ought to be done in this situation, "Lord I'll tell you what I think you need to do here in my family, I'll tell you Lord what I need in my career." "But the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice." And the Hebrew literal translation is, "And after the fire a sound of gentle stillness."

Loved ones, that's what we need, that's what we need. A sound of gentle stillness and the presence of our Father whereby we receive from him what he's going to do in this situation and then we ask him to do that and the prayer is answered. And his purpose has moved forward, that's really it. But, you know, these old souls of ours are so swollen with human love and sympathy and these old minds of ours are so arrogant in their convictions and ideas of what God ought to do in our situations, that we're offering up soulish prayers all the time and then wondering why they aren't answered. And all the time, the Spirit himself is interceding within us with sighs that are too deep for words. And he who knows the mind of the Spirit, understands that mind because the Spirit always intercedes according to the will of God.

So there is a dear Spirit inside you that is trying to pray the right prayer. And that dear Spirit is trying to break down all your personality strengths that want very good things, but they're the wrong things. And they're preventing God bringing about his will. So I pray, you know, that some of you who have fought this business of unanswered prayer will begin to listen to God along these lines and begin to be used by him to bring about his purposes. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we have done it for the best motive in the world but we see that we've been sending up to you prayers that are filled with selfishness and filled with our own egotistical ideas of what should be done. Father we see that we're just foolish children, that you are the elder Father, you have wisdom beyond ours. You know what we need before we even ask it. And all you want is for us to discover what you intend to do and then ask you to do it. Lord, we thank you. Thank you for tying yourself to us in that way. And Father we apologize for the countless occasions when we have simply been filling the atmosphere with static and with interference instead of voicing to you your desires for us. So Father we commit ourselves to seeking you and beginning to understand your dear mind through the power of the Holy Spirit. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.