

What is Love? Part 1

Romans 9:3a

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

How many of you ever experienced "esprit de corps"? Maybe you say, "Asian flu, yes -- even hay fever and mumps and measles -- but 'esprit de corps'? No. What are the symptoms?" Really, it is not a disease at all. It is a French phrase; "esprit" which means "spirit", "de" which means "of" and "corps" which means "body". It is "the spirit of the body". It actually refers to group unity, or unanimity in a group of people who are set on achieving one single purpose.

Probably all of us here have experienced it when the family decided to clean out the basement. Everybody's fed up with it. They are fed up with the mess so they are determined to get it done -- and it doesn't matter whether you carry or whether I push or pull -- or whether you brush or I wash. Everybody is just anxious to get the thing done. They are not all caught up with their own little job, but they are all preoccupied with the general purpose of getting the basement cleaned out.

You have experienced it when the family was preparing for a vacation and everybody had that "esprit de corps" feeling. "Let's get going. Let's get the show on the road. Whatever we have to do, let's get it done." You have experienced it when the youth group in the church ran a car wash. And you probably remember that often, at the end of the day, after you had engaged in some project like that, you thought, "Ah, it would be so good if life were like that all the time!" It was so good to feel the freedom to do whatever needed to be done. It was good to see everybody involved in achieving the same thing with nobody wrapped up in their own little thing and their own little purpose. You somehow had a great feeling of unity with each other, and it was amazing how quickly you got the thing done.

So many of us, I think, have just wished that same "esprit de corps" would govern our lives. When you get a group of people who see not just their own little job, but who see the purpose of the whole thing, and who are concerned about that purpose in their hearts, it makes all the difference in the world. But it is surprising how difficult it is to do that, isn't it? Even those of us who are in Fish Enterprises, and who have the great motivation of participation in Jesus, find that we are always trying to escape from the excellent training we have had in self-preoccupation. Isn't it true that most of us, after ten or eleven years of age, began to enter into a strict training of self-preoccupation? We were trained to be interested in our little part of the job or a project and to forget the big picture. That is somebody else's responsibility. And so, at Garden Court we have the same kind of trouble that probably all of you who work outside jobs have -- in seeing the big picture -- in behaving as the owner. Sometimes I will share, "Look! An owner is concerned when a compressor breaks down on the refrigerator. If you know that it is broken down, you act as the owner, phone the repair man, and bring him in. An owner is concerned with the way the building looks. If there is paper on the floor, you lift it. An owner is concerned with how many cups are broken that day and how many dollars are lost."

But loved ones, it is interesting how all of us have such a struggle to be concerned with the big picture. We need to rise into a realm where we begin to see the thing through the owner's eyes. That makes all the difference. Even in a human organization or a secular business, once you get a group of people who are concerned about the thing as a whole and they do whatever is needed to get the thing going -- whether it is their job or not -- then a remarkable kind of dynamic power is released

which makes things go effortlessly.

We have said that those of us who believe that we were created by a loving Father -- who lovingly oversees every event in our lives day by day, cares for us, watches over us, and supplies all our needs -- do not experience sorrow and pain when personal catastrophes occur, or oppressive environments exist in our lives, or unexpected disappointments come upon us. We do not experience sorrow and pain because we have been crucified with Jesus. We have died to self with him and we regard these things as occurring not to us, but really to him. We are freed from worrying about them because we know he can handle them. But we do experience the sorrow and pain of seeing other people through the eyes of the Owner of the Universe because we are at last freed from our own little, petty, narrow, parochial concerns.

We are freed into his concern and we begin to be concerned with the things he is concerned about. We begin to see the dear prostitute in a bedroom in Paris through his eyes. We feel all the pain that he feels as he sees her misuse the dear body he has given her. We see the dear father who is sarcastic and cutting with his children through God's eyes, through the Owner of the Universe's eyes. We feel the same sorrow and pain that he feels when he sees the beautiful plan that he had for father and children behaving together in love, being dashed to pieces. We begin to experience the same pain He experiences when He sees a group of people in a church talking about somebody else in a critical way. Loved ones, that is really the secret. If you and I can begin to see the world through God's eyes, from his point of view and not from our point of view, then we would begin to experience an incredible power, the shadow of which many of us have experienced in ordinary "esprit de corps" situations.

Of course our Father, who is our Maker, really wants us to see that. He wants us to see the unreality in which most of us live. He wants us to see that most of us are like a father who is in the Titanic with his family down in the cabin. They are playing Monopoly. Suddenly, the announcements start coming over the public address system from the captain saying that the water is pouring through the bulkheads faster than the pumps can clear it and they have to abandon ship. The captain is describing where you have to get your life boat and where you have to gather. The dad in the cabin says, "It is okay. I will stuff this carpet under the door and that will keep the water out of our cabin. We will be okay, so let's go on and get back to the Monopoly game." Really, many of us are like that. Many of us are involved in stuffing the carpet under the door and carrying on with our own little job or our own little home or our own little piece of study. We are utterly preoccupied with that and that is all we see -- that little, narrow, parochial aim of ours. That is all we experience -- the elation or the depression of our stocks rising or of our salary falling, the elation and depression of a new friendship or a friendship breaking up, the elation and depression which comes from our little vacation coming up or our vacation being over.

Loved ones, really, we are living in the midst of unreality. We are not concerned with the reason why God put us here at all. We are all busy stuffing our own little bit of carpet under the door and not realizing that the whole thing is going to go down in a matter of years -- that we will not save ourselves or our family or our futures. Of course, what God wants us to see is that he has a purpose that is far beyond the one that we have. Loved ones, He has! God put us here for a definite purpose. He put us here to draw every one of us, if possible, to a place in our lives where we would let the spirit of Jesus remold us and remake us into his image. That is God's purpose. And that is why we are here. That is why you have been given seventy or eighty years here. This isn't an end in itself -- nor is this a place where you have to concentrate on getting enough clothes around yourself to keep yourself alive. This place is a probationary time where God is asking you to receive the Spirit

of his Son into your life and to allow that Spirit to make you like his Son so that you will be able to live with them forever and help them bring the order of the universe into the order of their wills. That is God's purpose.

Now loved ones, the moment you die to your own little purposes that you have set up in your life to get some satisfaction -- the moment you begin to be concerned with God's purposes -- the moment you begin to see the universe from the Owner's viewpoint -- the moment you begin to live for the same purposes for which he lived and died -- at that moment, a new power is released in your life. Really! It is a new power that begins to make you feel an integrated personality yourself -- to make you begin to feel that this world is not just a hostile place. It begins to make you feel there is some meaning in your life. But above all, your life begins flowing instead of chugging along, detouring and zigzagging. It begins to flow in a straight line. It begins to improve and to develop the moment you begin to be preoccupied with the Creator's views.

That is what Paul was talking about in Romans 9:2: "...that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race." He was seeing them through his Father's eyes and feeling as his Father felt. Paul says the same in Galatians 4:19-29: "My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" I don't know about you, but I'd be tempted to see that and say, "It's well for him. He had everything laid out and all he had to be concerned with was whether Christ was fully formed in them or not. Boy, if he'd had my troubles and my worries and my anxieties -- if he'd had all the brothers and sisters that I have, and the families that I have, and the job problems that I have, then he'd know what travail is!"

Loved ones, do you see? We are dumb, dumb, dumb! It is the wrong way around. It is the wrong way around completely! We are stupid when we think of the worry and anxiety we have put into our salaries, our bank accounts, our food, and our clothes, because if we will put God's purposes first, he will add all those things unto us. We don't have to be concerned with it because he promises to take care of it for us. You are alive. You have clothes on your back and you have a home to go home to. So he hasn't really failed you yet, has he?

The amazing thing is, we are so proud and self-centered. Think of the thousand times when things could have gone wrong and of the hundreds of times when you could have been killed on the road. Think of the millions of times that all the money could have been lost. Think of the times when the stuff was stolen and you got it more than back. Don't you see that it is time we stop bluffing ourselves and saying, "It is my own ingenuity and cleverness that has gotten me here so far, and unless I keep being exceptionally clever and shrewd about my own concerns, I'm not going to make it to the end."

Loved ones, you are going to make it! You have made it now despite your own dumbness. God has brought you through to this place and he will take you all the way if you stop concentrating on trying to stuff the carpet under the door. If you will stop concentrating on your own selfish, petty little self-advancement and your self-preservation -- if you will die with Jesus and stop living for what you can get to eat and what you can get to wear and what you can put over your head, you will see the peace and beauty of it. You will begin to say, "Lord God, this is getting me nowhere. Is this all I get out of my life -- to keep myself alive until I die some forty years hence? It is not worth it. Lord God, if you've put us all here so that we can become like your Son, Jesus, then that is what I'm going to be interested in. I'm going to do it not only for my own life, but for my brothers and sisters, too. I'm going to start looking at my brothers and sisters not for what I can

get out of them, not for what use I can make of them, and not as people who can spoil things in my life. I'm going to forget what they can do to me and I'm going to be willing for them to do to me whatever you want them to do to me. Lord, I'm going to start looking at them as people who can be made like your Son, Jesus. I'm going to start loving them that way, and praying for them that way and begin to let your concern about them be more important in my heart than my concerns about myself."

Loved ones, that releases a power that is greater than nuclear energy. It changes your own life. What you are doing is giving up what you cannot keep for getting what you cannot lose. That is all you are doing. It is just really a good deal. This is the purpose for which we were made. Don't you see what a change it makes to the loved ones that you meet every day? Don't you see what a change it makes in the office if you go to the office and the others no longer need to fear you because they think you are always trying to undermine their position? Don't you see the difference it makes in an office when they begin to sense, "This person really wants the best for me?" And at first, they cannot believe it. It is not long, loved ones, before the Spirit of Jesus begins to change their lives and they begin to be like that also.

If you say to me, "Can we make the whole world like that?" We probably can't. But we can make our place of work, our home, and our school like that. We can make these places like that if we take a straight, blunt look at reality and die with Jesus to taking care of our own interests and our own concerns and begin to live with God's view in mind. In other words, if you say to me, "How does God change this world and events and people?" He changes it through you and me identifying ourselves with the Owner's viewpoint -- through you and me beginning to look at his world through his eyes. Secondly, he changes it through us identifying ourselves with those loved ones themselves. That is what real love is about. Love is such a big subject that I think we need to talk about it next Sunday.

Would you this week stop yourself at least before you go to bed at night, and ask yourself, "Has this little miserable mind of mine been running 'round and 'round in circles thinking about what I should eat or what I should drink or about what I should put on? Have I really been seeing things through God's eyes? Have I really lived for the purpose for which he made me?" Loved ones, honestly -- you who are sitting there as sceptics -- all of these things will be added unto you, and there are many of us here who can prove that. Actually, if you look at yourself, you can almost prove it for yourself when you think how often you would have destroyed yourself if God hadn't prevented you.

So, will you look this week, loved ones, in a real down-to-earth, sensible way -- look at your own life, and ask yourself, if not at the end of each day, then when you are sitting at the traffic lights, "What am I concerned about at this moment? Am I concerned with getting those shoes repaired, with getting my check into the bank account, with whether this person will do what I ask them to do -- or am I really concerned with how many people I can bring closer to the image of Jesus, God's Son? Am I concerned with how many people I can bring closer to that carefree, loving person that the Father has intended us to be?" If you would honestly be real about that this week, God will begin to change you through His Spirit. Start being real about that. Start being practical about that --then God will begin to change you.

We didn't have car washes in Ireland -- we had no cars to wash! But we did all kinds of things together and I had many of those days when I thought, "If life could be like this!" Loved ones, life can be like an "esprit de corps" experience and you can make it like that if you allow God's Spirit

to change your life into that kind of life. He really can do it. He started in this building and he can start in the building where you work.

Let's pray. Dear Father, we thank you that you tell us again and again each spring that life can be more. Life can be fresh. Things can start over again. Things can change. Every morning, Lord, you bring new sunlight out, new warm heat to give us comfort and to give things growth -- and you're always giving us the same message, "It can be through the power of my Spirit in your life." Lord, I trust you for each of my brothers and sisters now, that in their work and school and home this week, they will echo your word, "It can be!" We can live for your purposes and we can live preoccupied with becoming like you. You can enable us to do it by the power of Jesus' Spirit. Amen.