

Conditional Regeneration

Romans 10:13

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

All of us would admit that it is nice to be praised. It does give you nice feelings to be praised. And yet, it is slavery to live for praise.

I suppose most of us need to know that we are appreciated -- that is, it is nice to have praise that is kind of incidental, that is not deliberate and not flattery, that just comes naturally in the course of conversation. We want to be appreciated for the kind of people we are and the things we are doing.

I think that most of us would agree that what we really mean when we say it is nice to be praised is, it is nice to have other people's love. It is the love and approval that matters to us. Flattery, or praise that is obvious, puts you off and makes you distrust the other person. Yet, it is very easy to become a slave to praise. It can begin to spoil your enjoyment of life because you are so busy trying to get praise from a certain person, or trying to keep in that person's favor. Yet, it is very easy to begin to live that way, twenty-four hours a day, looking for compliments all the time.

We come to the place where we are "self-esteemaholics," where we begin to live for the praise that somebody will give us. We come to the point where we have to have a compliment-boost every twenty-four hours or we are in the pits. It becomes a perversion, taking something good to such an extreme that it becomes an evil. That perversion is so prevalent among us human beings that there is actually a school of behavioral psychology and a whole philosophy of behavior modification that is based on mankind's slavery to praise.

What gives that evil of slavery to people's praises so much power? It is because of its close similarity to love. We were made for love. Love brings a real sense of approval and appreciation. But the beautiful thing about love is that it has no ulterior motives. It does not approve of us or praise us in order to get us to fulfill somebody's selfish purposes. It is free, honest, and real. But praise that becomes a perversion to us is actually using love to get us to do things we would not otherwise do.

All of us are increasingly involved in a social and professional system that is based on this perversion of mankind's slavery to praise. There is not one of us who has not taken part in that professional system that tries to motivate people by giving them little tidbits of praise. The system gives them a bigger desk, a better position, a better computer, or a key to the executive washroom, and they are good for another six months of subordination.

We all know that, and yet we do take part in that kind of system. It runs through all our corporations, a lot of our psychology, and a lot of our practices and principles of human relationships.

The interesting thing is that self-esteemaholics are like alcoholics. Alcoholics can come to the point where the blood contains so much alcohol that the level cannot be reversed. That makes an

alcoholic. Isn't it true that many of us self-esteemaholics come to the place where we would not admit we are self-esteemaholics? Our personality has become so perverted, so used to responding to little tidbits of praise, that the mental and emotional system has come to a level that is irreversible.

Have you found that to be so? Have you found that there are times when you do not want to beg when they offer you a biscuit? You do not want to preen yourself when they give you a better desk, because you know it is a game -- yet your dear old personality has become used to it. It has become so perverted that it just responds without you being able to control it.

I suppose, loved ones, that is the basis of most of the commercials on television. It is the basis of most of the appeals made to us. And yet we seem so helpless, don't we? We are being used, yet we cannot help ourselves.

Of course the truth is that there are only two ways to live. You either live off the love that your dear Creator has for you, or you do something to fill the vacuum of self-worth and self-esteem caused by your rejection of God's love. You automatically fill it by the counterfeit love of other human beings.

The tragedy is, of course, that all the other dear souls upon whose love you are becoming more and more dependent, and to whose praise and approval you are becoming more and more addicted, are themselves involved in getting the same kind of recognition from you, to fill the vacuum in their self-esteem. And so we are all waltzing around in a kind of mutual-adulation society, with our environment intensifying the problems of our heredity. Our counterfeit praises intensify the problem in the personality that is already perverted in its own emotional system and makeup.

So the truth is, if you depend on God's love you are dependent on a free love, the kind of love that Jesus gave to the leper. He could not get any emotional or material satisfaction from that leper. He loved that leper because his heart was filled with love. You either have to depend on that kind of love, or you have to somehow fill the gap in your sense of self-worth by drawing the counterfeit love and praises from other human beings.

Most of us have been in that mutual-adulation society so long that we are worn out and fed up. We have tried to change this automatic response to other people's praises, but it seems to be too deep in our nature, and somehow we cannot change our nature. The human role seems incapable of changing the perverted personality we have developed. And it is no wonder. Only the original manufacturer can do it.

If you plug a 110-volt appliance into 220 volts, you will burn up the electrical wiring. That Hoover or Mixmaster has to go back to the manufacturer. It has to be dismantled in the workshop where it was originally manufactured, and then it has to be rebuilt from the base up. You know that once it has been burned out it will not simply respond if you plug it into the correct voltage. It has to be rebuilt.

That is exactly what has happened with us. God foresaw that we would reject his love. He foresaw that we would substitute a counterfeit love and the praise of our peers. He foresaw the kind of perversion we would produce in our personality.

And so, in that sphere of eternity which is a spiritual world where present, past, and future

coincide in one great eternal now -- in that sphere --- God took the perverted emotions you have, the emotions that are the playthings of other people's praises and love, and he put them into his Son. In this act he absolutely dismantled you and completely rebuilt you again. He has created a new personality for you that is available now. He put it this way in the Bible in Colossians 3:9: "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature."

You cannot change your nature -- but God has already done it. Some of us are a bit like John Calvin. Calvin was a great servant of the Lord and a great theologian, and he had to emphasize certain truths in his time. He underemphasized one great truth of scripture.

Many of us are like him when we say, "I can see that the nature was changed of the people whom Paul was writing to. I can see that Jesus has died for the elect. Jesus has died for those people who have believed in him and are Christians now. But, I don't see that my old nature has been changed in Jesus. I mean, it will be, when I somehow get into him and when I get into this Christianity all the way. I know that my old nature loves people's praises. I know it has been destroyed and completely renewed -- when I am somehow a Christian."

Now, loved ones, the amazing truth is this: Jesus bore Hitler's nature to death with himself at Calvary. That is kind of heart-rending, isn't it? Especially when you think of how Hitler ignored that, and when you think of the destruction he wrought in this world. But the truth is that Jesus did actually bear all the pain and agony of allowing Hitler's selfish, hateful, and petty nature to be destroyed in himself.

Hitler, or a Nero, will not go into a hell of alienation and loneliness because their old natures were not destroyed in Jesus. They will go because they refused to believe that, and because they refused to live in that truth.

Lest you doubt that, I would remind you of the verse: "Christ died for all; therefore all died," (which is a paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 5:14). This means, loved ones, that even if you are living in the midst of a bad temper at this moment, or living in the midst of slavery to people's praises, your nature was destroyed with Jesus and recreated in him. It is available to you at this moment if you will only believe and live in it.

The truth is that all of us here were crucified. The atonement was universal; it applies to everyone. "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him." (Romans 10:12). None of us will go into a hell of alienation, loneliness and darkness after this life is over because our personalities have not been recreated in Jesus. The only reason any of us will go into a hell of loneliness and darkness is because we have not called upon God. "For, every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13)

God bestows the riches of Calvary and the miracle of the transformation of Calvary upon all who call upon him. The only reason any of us here will not live after this life is over is because we have not called upon God.

It might be good to deal with this truth: although atonement is universal, regeneration is conditional. In other words, we can only receive that new nature now if we do certain things -- if we call upon God.

What does it mean to "call upon God"? It does not mean what many of you think. We know, for example, that God listens to foxhole prayers. God has answered many of our foxhole prayers. We have cried out in desperation, and God has answered. Many of us here have had such experiences, and we had not been living close to God at all.

But, loved ones, it is not God's will to produce a group of friends who are bought by the things that he gives them when they are in trouble. It is not God's will to produce "rice-Christians" -- people who love him just because he gives them things. Even though God does answer some of our foxhole prayers out of his universal generosity, that is not the way he bestows the riches of Calvary. He will only be able to make real the change in our nature that was wrought in Jesus at Calvary if we call upon him in another way.

The word is "epikaleomai" in the Greek. It means "to call upon". It took on a technical meaning in the Old and New Testaments. People who worship a god begin their prayers with that god's name. People who worship Baal say, "O Baal." People who worship Jehovah say, "O Jehovah."

That verb had a technical meaning involving worship. It was a calling upon a god by people who worshipped that god, not just people who called upon him in desperation. It meant calling upon him in the sense of worshipping him, honoring him, and trusting his nature. Now, those are the people in whom God is able to make real the transformation that took place in Jesus on Calvary.

"For, every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13) That means the people who look upon God as the most important person in the world, people who trust and respect his nature, people who acknowledge him and treat him as God. It is to these people that God is able to make real the transformation that took place on Calvary.

How can you be free from your present slavery to people's opinions? How can you be free from this system that gives you the key to the executive washroom or a better desk in order to get you to do something? Realize that if you had been the only person in this world whose personality was twisted by these things, Jesus would still have died for you to make available to you the new nature. Realize that Jesus "bore in his own body on the tree" your particular set of emotional and intellectual perversions.

He allowed it to be destroyed there so that your nature has been changed. The nature by which you are living at this moment is a lie. It has been destroyed. It does not exist except in your deceived imagination.

Secondly, change the whole orientation of your life. You can do it because your nature has been changed. Remember that Mixmaster with the burned out wiring? If you plug it into 110 volts, without it being rebuilt, you will get nothing. But, once it has been rebuilt, all you have to do is plug it into 110 volts and it goes as it was meant to.

So it is with us. It is possible at this moment to change the orientation of your whole life by a decision of your will. At this moment it is possible to say, "Lord, I thank you that you have completely destroyed the old nature that was enslaved to other people's opinions. Thank you that I have a new mental and emotional apparatus that thrives on your love and approval. Lord, from now on it is your approval that is going to run my life."

You were made to depend and trust your dear Father who put you here. He will take good care of you.

There is no man or woman who can harm you, or do anything to destroy your professional life or family life. There is no one who can do anything that God does not permit them to do for your own good. At this moment you can say, "Lord, from now on I'm going to live my life by your approval and your love."

Loved ones, I wish you would all see that you CAN actually do that this moment. If Jesus had not died and that old emotional system of yours had not been destroyed, you could not do it. But, because this has happened, you can do it this very moment. It does not matter how subservient you have become to your friends' opinions. You can stop it this very moment.

Let's Pray.

Dear Father, I pray for my brothers and sisters, especially for those of us who have been so worn out by people's opinions of us, people's praises and people's criticisms -- that we're almost punch drunk. We don't know how to become original livers, who live life originally. Lord, I pray for dear ones here who are like that. Lord, I pray that you'll show them that they can change this very moment; that you are here, you are looking upon them, that they were made to live off your love and not off other people's love. And you will pour that love into them -- if they will simply let you be the one significant "other" in their lives, and take the place of the many, insignificant others, that they have allowed to run their lives up to this moment. Lord, thank you that it is possible to repent, to change our whole minds and our whole way of thinking, and to submit to you and to your opinion of us above all others. Thank you, Lord. Amen.