

Our Greatest Unpaid Debt (Romans 12:1a)

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

I just thought of a new business that we could go into. You know we have the . restaurants, a manufacturing company and a construction company. I thought of a new one we could go into: spare parts. For what? For bodies. What kind of bodies? Ordinary bodies like the one you are sitting in at the moment. We probably need to get an inventory organized so that we could begin to take orders on Wednesday. Could someone sell me an arm? I'll give you thirty dollars for your arm. Fifty? A hundred dollars? You want to cash in on inflation? I'll give a thousand dollars if anybody will sell me their arm. Some of you are thinking of those legal cases where the attorneys get a half million or a million dollars because some young person loses his arm. Okay, I'll give you a million dollars for your arm. Now will you sell me your arm? What on earth did you pay for it that you won't sell it for a million? You got it free? Who gave you it? Did your mom make it?

We will get it organized and I'll get a checker and a cash register and as you go out, like Target, we will punch it up. Alright, one right arm, more used than the left arm, but maybe more usable -- a million and a quarter dollars. Then one nose, dented, but maybe worth a million dollars; holds glasses and smells things. Two legs, maybe two million each? Then, two eyes, maybe three million each. Would you sell your chin? Maybe a million-and-a-half for your chin. How about your mouth? Do you want to check it in? About five million? You say you wouldn't really be a human being without your mouth? You would have plenty left, really. You wouldn't be able to eat strawberries or talk, but you would be able to touch and feel. How about your hands? Would you sell them for five million each? (This business is crumbling as we talk about it, because if this is going to be the wholesale price, what do I have to charge retail for these things?) Now, let's get to the really important things -- the real essential things. How about your kidney? I'll give you three million for your kidney. Your second kidney, I'll give you a billion for your second kidney. You can't do it? Your heart, I'll give you five thousand million for your heart. Will you sell your heart?

It isn't going to work, because the things you are prepared to sell me would come to two or three billion and then the things that I really need you won't sell me for any price at all. Now, why not? You got them free. St. Francis of Assisi says that is the greatest unpaid debt in the whole universe. It is amazing that when we talk in these terms, money doesn't matter, does it? You are sitting there thinking, "What am I worth, what is my net worth?", but the moment somebody starts offering you money for what you are, you begin to realize that you are beyond price. You wouldn't dream of selling even a finger, would you? It is a big step when a mom or a dad lets one of their kidneys go for a transplant for a dear child, isn't it? But you wouldn't think of doing it just for money.

Now loved ones, that unpaid debt is the basis for Paul's outline of how we are to live that he gives us in these last few chapters of Romans. The basis is that unpaid debt that certainly you owe to somebody. Even if you are an atheist you owe it to a Creator who can see you at this moment. That's what Paul says. Maybe you will look at it in Romans 12:1. "I appeal (and that is "parakaleo" in Greek) to you ("numas") therefore ("oun") brethren, ("adelphoi") by the mercies of God "dia ton oiktimon, tou theou)." That is what Paul is saying. "I appeal to you through the mercies of God or by the mercies of God or on account of the mercies of God." The Greek word "dia" also means "on account of" the mercies of God or "because of" the mercies of God. And "parakaleo" is not so much

"beseech," as the King James version translates it, as it is "admonish" you, "advise" you, or "appeal" to you. "When you look at the mercies of God that have been given freely to you, I appeal to you to live the way I'm going to outline in these next few chapters." That's what Paul is saying.

It is good sense, isn't it? I mean, if you took delivery of the most expensive, complex computer in the universe you would certainly want to operate it the way the manufacturer outlined in his manual, so that is good sense. You receive what you have, the most complex and the most expensive computer in the universe --that's what your brain is -- and it is just good sense that you will start operating it the way the owner outlined in his manual. Actually there is more than that, isn't there? Paul is saying "Look, you got all these things free. You got those bones and those legs free, you got those eyes free, you got those invaluable hands free, you got those arms that are worth millions of dollars free; surely out of gratitude to the one who gave you them, you will want to live the way he outlined!" It does make sense, doesn't it? You know how uneasy you feel when you owe a debt to somebody and you don't pay it. You know if you have taken anything that is not your own and your conscience is still alive, you feel uneasy every time you use it; so you can imagine the peace of mind that comes to you when you begin to repay this debt that you have with that body of yours.

Of course, the truth is, those aren't the only mercies, are they? The hostages would soon put us right about that. They would say, especially that guy that was in solitary confinement for more than a year, that the eyes are important, but if you have only darkness to look at, there isn't much enjoyment. If you have the same scene to look at day after day, there isn't much enjoyment. No; part of the mercies of God are the things you have to look at with the eyes. The variety and the diversity of the mountains and the hills and rivers, and the purples and the yellows and the greens, and the beauty of the lakes and the deer and the birds and the sunset. Those are all part of the mercies of God. Those are the things that enable us to enjoy what we have. Part of the mercies of God are those incredible linkages between our eyes and our ears and our brain and our mind and our emotions that enable us to look at a sunset and enjoy it. Those are all part of the mercies of God. Paul says, "I appeal to you when you think of all these, because of all these things that you have received freely."

Then you know fine well, even that doesn't finish the mercies of God, because the smell of a barbecued chicken or the smell of woodsmoke or the rustle of leaves are nice, but they are nothing compared with the other mercies of God --the enjoyment of good friends, the oneness of sorrow or joys shared with somebody that you trust, the dignity of respect that other people give you, the awareness of the sense of affection that you get from other people, and the peace and joy that comes from intimate conversation with somebody you trust. Those are part of the mercies of God, and those are really the invisible things that make all of life worthwhile.

Even that doesn't run out the mercies of God, because you can revel in all those things because you are confident that they have been given freely to you by the loving heart of a kind Father who has given you them without repentance. His Word says the gifts of God are given without repentance, and so you needn't be afraid that you are going to lose those things. We don't need to spend our lives trying to protect and guard our futures and our money, our positions or our jobs. We can relax and enjoy them knowing that there is a dear God who has given them, and He will protect them as long as He sees that it is good for us to have them. So part of that is the mercy of God. Paul says that you people have got it all your own way. Everything that you have has been given to you freely by a dear Father who spends His life guarding these things for you so that you can enjoy them. "Now, I appeal to you because of the mercies of God that surround you and fill your life; I advise you, live the

way I'm going to outline."

The amazing fact is that it is even deeper than that, because some of us would say, "Well, yes, at times I do enjoy those mercies. At times I do enjoy a sense of achievement at work, at times I do enjoy the trust of real friends, at times I have enjoyed the glory of a sunset, at times I have enjoyed the affection and the trust of other people, but I would have to say my mind and my emotions and my arms and my legs don't always operate as they should. In fact, often I have to confess to you that I'm so worried and anxious that I can't enjoy the sunset. I'm so busy trying to guard my future and trying to guard my possessions and trying to guard my life that I have no time to enjoy other people. In fact, often I wonder what my friends think of me, and sometimes I'm very concerned that they don't think well of me. I know in my mind those are the mercies of God, but often this body and personality of mine don't operate that way."

Loved ones, that's the deeper meaning of the Greek word "oiktermon", because the inner meaning of that word that means "mercy" is God's "tender pities". Paul says, "I appeal to you by the tender pities of God," and what he means is this: God sees the way you and I are. He sees that the thing has got a bit off track, and He sees that your personality is not working with the same joy and delight and freedom as that of the birds and the animals. He sees that, and that's why God engaged in the greatest recall in history, even greater than General Motors or Ford. Just as all things were made by Jesus, including your arms and legs and eyes, and nothing was made without Him that was made, so God saw that what He had made had become perverted by our misuse of it, and He took you and all that had gone wrong with you and put you into His Son and absolutely remade you there. That's God's tenderest pity -- that He took all that you are and He remade you so that you would work right. That's what Calvary means. Paul says, "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-4)

Loved ones, that has taken place and that's the deepest reason why Paul says, "I appeal to you through the tender pities of God, to live the way I'm going to outline." Why? Because your remade personality already exists on the shelves of God's heaven, and Paul is saying, "Live this way, because it will enable the Holy Spirit to manifest that renewed personality here on earth in your present life." That's it. Not "I appeal to you to live this way so that you will be renewed." No! "I appeal to you to live this way so that the renewal that has already taken place in heaven in you can be manifested by the Holy Spirit."

Let's say you bought one of those cars that was faulty and GM or Ford engages in one of their famous recalls, and they pull your car back in. You drive it into the factory. Why do you drive it out again after it has been repaired? Do you drive it out again so that you can repair it? No! The maker already repaired it; he already renewed it; he already put the fault right. You drive it out so that you can experience the benefit of the repair. That is what Paul is saying. "I appeal to you, by the tender pities of God that have enabled Him in His Son Jesus, not only to make you once but to absolutely remake you, I appeal to you to live the way I'm going to outline to you, not so that you will be changed but so that the renewed personality that has already been created in Jesus will begin to be manifested here in this world."

I think some of us wonder, "Well, you say I have to be patient just by my own willpower." No! You have to set your will that you are going to be patient, whatever; the changed personality that God wrought in Jesus is then manifested in you. It is a supernatural power. That's why Paul is saying,

"I appeal to you by the mercies of God to live the way, to do the things, to say the things that I'm going to outline to you, not so that you will be changed but so that the changed personality that has already been wrought in Jesus will be manifested by the Holy Spirit." A lot of us say, "I don't want to be worried about what people think of me, but I can't. I've tried it a thousand times." Paul is saying, "Listen, already there is a personality in heaven created in Jesus and raised with Him that has your name on it, and it has no trouble being absolutely indifferent to what people think of it. Now as far as you are concerned, forget the consequences of what they are going to think. You just do that, and you find this power living inside you that frees you from fear."

That is it, loved ones. It is a miracle. You drive the car out of the factory, not hoping that by driving it you will repair it, but you drive it because you are confident that it has been fixed and repaired. That is what Paul is saying. "I advise you in the light of what God has done to you all in Jesus, and the changes He has wrought in you, and the perfect person He has made you in His Son; do what I'm going to outline to you in these chapters."