

## The Key to Sanity

Romans 12:1b

Sermon Transcript by Ernest O'Neill

What kind of command do you most resent? What kind of directive do you most hesitate to carry out? Wouldn't you say, especially the one for which no reason is given, the one that isn't explained to you at all?

You remember it was like that when we were children at home and at school. We kept on asking, "Why, daddy? Why, mom? Why must I eat my cereal?" and those questions that drive parents mad-- "Why should I not eat seventeen Hershey bars before lunch?" Then they give the reason, and you were faced with the question of whether you would obey and live according to the reality that they explained or whether you would disobey and plunge yourself into a kind of meaningless existence.

Now it is true that the more you begin to know a person and the more you begin to trust a person's perception of reality, the more you can take some categorical commands from them that aren't explained. Isn't that true? That is essential in this life. That's how John Wayne used to save so many of his companions from the bullets of the bad guys. They ducked when he told them to duck, without receiving a four-page memo outlining the philosophy of the bullet and the intention of the enemy and all that kind of thing.

It is true that we can obey categorical commands for which no reason is given if we have come to trust the perception of reality of a certain person. That is essential; otherwise, life could not go on.

But, loved ones, it is true that the normal life we have as rational creatures necessitates that we understand why we should do a thing before doing it. That's the normal life that our dear Creator has given to us rational creatures. We hear that six inches of snow have fallen during the night; therefore, we leave home ten minutes early because we know the traffic will be slow. We hear that the air quality in Minneapolis has reached a critically low level, so we try to avoid going out into the open air if we have respiratory troubles. I read this "Poison" label on a bottle on my kitchen shelf, so I don't immediately swig it. I decide, "No, there is poison in it. I won't drink it."

Normally our lives as rational creatures are governed by the principle that you believe certain things to be real; therefore, you act in a certain way because of it. You are told that certain things are true; therefore, you are willing to do certain other things about them.

Now you may say, "Well, that is pretty plain common sense. Why make such an issue of it?" Because so many people today are under a great deception about the irrational. Do you know that there are young and middle-aged and presumably old executives, many wealthy and many poor people throughout our society who have come to believe that the greatest happiness can be found in plunging into the irrational? There are thousands of men and women who live next to us in our neighborhoods who have concluded that the euphoric high that you get from heroin or other hallucinogenic drugs is the only happiness that is worth anything. Even though we know rationally that it is destroying their bodies, destroying their lives, yet they believe that a plunge into the irrational is the only way to happiness. I think we know from reading the magazines that that is true.

Actually, that has its counterpart among us so-called religious people. I don't know if you realize it, but there are many religious people that think that God's commands are those things within that seem most irrational to you. Many so-called Christians believe that God's commands are bound to be irrational, and so they spend their days listening for inner, subjective voices that cannot be confirmed at all by the conclusions of other logical minds.

I don't know if you have worked out why those two groups plunge into the irrational that way. I think ordinary non-religious persons plunge in desperation into the irrational of the ouija board or heroin or hallucinogenic drugs because they think they are nothing but the sum total of their heredity plus environment. Their lives have become hopelessly machine-like, and somehow they have to burst out of that boring sameness. They don't see, of course, that the Creator himself is a magnificently diverse and versatile person who is able to free you into individuality when you really do start getting to know him.

What about the religious people? I think a lot of religious people run their lives listening to unconfirmed voices inside, because they think that their minds in the past have not been able to understand God's commands and that is bound to be the rule throughout their lives. They don't realize that God is able to renew your mind so that you are able to perceive why he is telling you to do certain things, and that, indeed, that is his normal pattern for your life--that our minds would become so renewed we would more and more understand why God was telling us to do certain things.

Loved ones, the normal pattern for our lives as rational Christians is-- "I see these are the facts; therefore, in the light of that I act this way. I believe this; therefore, I do that."

Now that's the format of all the letters that Paul ever wrote to the early churches. His approach was always: This is reality. Now, in the light of that, therefore, do this. As we begin this great "therefore" section in the letter to the Romans we need to see that that is the format in Romans also. From chapter one to chapter eight Paul explains what has happened between us and our Creator. In chapters nine through eleven, in a parenthesis, he explains how the Israel nation fits into that plan.

Then he says, "Now that's reality; therefore, you live like this." Today's verse is Romans 12:1, if you would like to look at it. We won't get any further than about one conjunction today I think, but we can get to that anyway. He has just spent eight chapters plus three explaining reality, and now he says, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies..." and then he goes on to outline in the next chapters how we are to live in the light of that.

Now I'd just like you to look at that fifth word in the sentence, "I appeal to you therefore." It is the word "therefore" that we will look at today.

The key to sanity in your life and mine is the existence of that "therefore." The key to the integration of your personality, the key to your mental and emotional and physical health depends on the health of that "therefore" in your life. That word in Greek is even smaller. It is the word "oun", three letters, just a tiny, tiny word.

But loved ones, your health as a human being depends utterly on the presence and the strong presence of that little conjunction in your life, because that little conjunction "therefore" joins together

two vital parts of your life. It joins together the things that you believe are real and the way you live. The key to sanity in your life and mine depends on the strong healthy existence of that "therefore." Actually to the degree that that "therefore" is strong in your life, you yourself will live a life of joy and peace and fulfillment. And to the extent that that "therefore" is weak, sick and shaking, your life will be disintegrated, unhealthy and will finally cease to exist.

Those of you who watched a certain program on television this past week know -the whole story of that "therefore." It was Robert Louis Stevenson's classic, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. You remember Dr. Jekyll believed much as Paul outlined in Romans 1-8. He believed that the Creator of the universe is actually the father of Jesus that he is a kind and loving person who pours love and fulfillment into every life that is prepared to live in his love and kindness towards other people. Dr. Jekyll believed that; therefore he lived the life of an unselfish city doctor.

In fact, he spent his time serving the poor and trying to improve the state and behavior of the prostitutes and down-and-outs in the city of London--except that he invented a drug that released within him another man that was utterly and completely different from what he appeared to be himself. When he took this drug his appearance changed from an older, more stable, steady and self-restrained doctor to an apparently younger-looking man who was filled with hatred, envy, a desire to kill, a desire to fornicate, and a desire to destroy. This man, Mr. Hyde, was suddenly released and went out and did things that Dr. Jekyll could not dream of doing. As the story went on, Jekyll violated the "therefore" in his life so often by repeatedly going back and taking the drug, that eventually he lost control of the Mr. Hyde, and Mr. Hyde began to take over even without Jekyll taking the drug.

Then you remember the tragic end of the story. Hyde took over Jekyll whenever he wanted, and destroyed and killed and hated and fornicated when he wished and expressed all the things that were alien to Dr. Jekyll. He did it to such an extent that eventually a monster was created that was neither one or the other but had the worst of both--a two-headed, hypocritical, schizophrenic monster that could only eventually be dealt with by destroying it. You remember he committed suicide.

Now, loved ones, that's what happens when the "therefore" in our lives grows weak. A monster is created that you cannot control. I don't know how many of us here would say, "That is why the 'therefore' in my life is weak. There is a part of me that believes that God is good and kind and loving. There is a part of me that wants to live with an unselfish love towards my friends and relatives. There is a part of me that wants to forget myself and live for other people and live for God who is my Father. That's the situation.

But there is in me another thing like that Hyde that rises up within me, and it is like a monster that I cannot control. It does want to lust and it does have pride and it does want people's praise and it does want whatever it wants to do. That's why the 'therefore' in my life is so weak. I can't do what I know reality says I should do, and sometimes I feel that it is kind of a hypocritical, schizophrenia that drives me almost to the border of insanity. I feel that the only way out of it is to kill the thing as Hyde eventually did. Loved ones, that's reality.

What's reality? That it was killed. That what was killed? Paul explains in chapters six, seven and eight what was killed -- the monster that is inside each of us. That was actually destroyed. The whole human race --you and your two-headed monster included -- was destroyed in Jesus, and you were raised up clean and pure and single-minded. That's what happened. That is what reality is. Paul

says, "Therefore, live with that attitude day by day." With what attitude? That the monster was destroyed; it is dead.

You say to me, "What happens when I slip? What happens when the Hyde seems to rise up again?" Paul says in chapter seven to forget it. The law was given to corral Hyde when he was alive. Now that Hyde has been crucified and destroyed in Jesus you don't need to get concerned about the law; you need to live with the attitude that that was crucified and destroyed. You say to me, "What will happen?" I'll tell you. The more you live or the more you lived as if Hyde were the real you, the more Hyde was able to take over again and again.

Now the more you live with Dr. Jekyll as the real you, seeing clearly that the Hyde was crucified with Jesus and has been destroyed, the more Jekyll is the real you; the more Jekyll will take over. That is the miracle of faith. That is why God says in Romans, "If by the Spirit--or through the Spirit--you put to death the deeds of the body...." That is how you do it. You continue to have that attitude of faith that the monster has been done away with in Jesus. If you say to me, "How will the change take place?" The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will day by day make the Jekyll in you stronger and stronger if you maintain that attitude that the old monster was destroyed in Jesus.

That is what Paul says. That in fact has happened; therefore, live in the light that it has happened. Every time Hyde pokes his head up, look up to God and say, "Thank you, Lord, that that was destroyed with you. Thank you. My job is to believe that and live with that altitude. As I do that, you, Holy Spirit, will make Jekyll more and more real in my life." Loved ones, is the "therefore" in good shape in your life? Are you living according to what you believe is real? I would ask us to be honest with ourselves. Are we living according to what we all believe is reality? Have we that attitude within ourselves?

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we have seen the envy, the jealousy, the lust and anger of Hyde so often within us that we have almost become persuaded that it is the real us. But, Lord, we do see what your dear Word says regarding our old self being crucified with Jesus. Even though at times we seem to be reaching out of a deep, deep pit, we would stretch up even a weak hand and grab hold of that truth, grab hold of what you said, Lord. Therefore, we are going to believe you that in fact the old Hyde within us has been crucified with Christ. We intend to live in the light of that now, Father. We intend to live with that attitude to the monster within and to see that the real us is the new person that has been raised up with Jesus and is at your right hand. Lord, we intend to live day by day like that new person.

O Holy Spirit, we trust you to restore to health the 'therefore' in our lives so that we may live as we believe. Lord, we ask you to show us where this applies in our lives this very day. We would go out on this limb whatever it costs that our lives may be sane and our personalities whole.

Amen.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit bring the reality and sanity to our lives today and throughout this week.