

## The Cure for False Humanity

Romans 14:5

By Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Romans 14:5, "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind." Several times I have mentioned to you what is obvious to all of us who have watched the buildings go up after the IDS Tower and that is that Minneapolis is changing radically as a city. Obviously the big money, in a sense, was always here with companies like Cargill and Pillsbury, but the big money is certainly rolling in now in large amounts and the big buildings are rolling in and the pseudo-sophistication is rolling in from the East -- from Chicago and New York.

Really, the city and its character are changing. And the old neighborhoods with their personalities and their individuality are beginning to disappear and the single-family dwellings are beginning to disappear and the condominiums are going up instead of the apartment buildings and that's the way our modern cities go, whether we like it or not.

The small neighborhoods, with their sense of personal individuality and personal loyalty to each other, go down and these great amorphous masses of city dwellers move in, who really don't know each other and live virtually apart from each other. So the city and its character are changing and there's really very little you can do to stop it.

The only thing you can do is plant as many Garden Courts and as many Eden Townhouses -- as many little communities, little trusting communities -- as possible, in as many cities in the world as you can. But there's really no way to stop the development of the modern, mass city.

One of the facts that this development makes very clear to us is man's real nature. Isn't that true? Man's real nature becomes very clear as he crowds together in these mass cities. It's like the improvement in communications and the widespread use of television: all these modern developments that draw man together force us to face man as he really is.

There is not a perversion in any corner of the world that is not blasted on all our screens and there isn't a mass murder that takes place in any country but we all watch it in the evening news so that one of the things that results from this modernization is that we see man much more as he really is.

I don't know if you have ever thought of it; but when we were all divided up into little towns and villages and all separated from one another in our own nations and our own countries and we couldn't tell what was going on in Italy, or we couldn't tell what was going on in the western part of the States, in those days we were kind of isolated from each other and in a way, the horror of man was isolated from the horror of man.

Actually we didn't see man as plainly as he really is. You probably know that from the 1850s on, man began to industrialize and began to realize that he was a humanity of his own -- that he was a universal humanity -- and he began to see himself as a universal power in the world. And from about that date, when the Victorians were in their heyday, from about that date man began to realize "We're strong -- I am not just this little man, this little village, I am not just a little

character in this little country -- we are humanity. We can achieve some things. We can do some wonderful things in the world by our own power." And that great confidence filled mankind.

You'll almost smile when you hear this poem which was written, not by a Christian, and not with any sense of our Christian kingdom, but purely as a secular poem, but this was the rising confidence that came into humanity; "These things shall be a loftier race than ere the world have known shall rise with flame of freedom in their souls and light of knowledge in their eyes. They shall be gentle, brave and strong to spill no drop of blood, but dare all that may plant man's lordship firm on earth and fire, and sea, and air. New arts shall bloom of loftier mould and mightier music fill the skies, and every life shall be a song when all the earth is paradise." John Addington Symonds

You just feel the cold thrill up your spine, don't you? Because you realize, "Yeah, he wrote that in terrible naivety, back in the end of the 19th century." H.G. Wells wrote this; "Can we doubt that presently our race will more than realize our boldest imaginations, that it will achieve unity and peace, that it will live, the children of our blood and lives will live, in a world made more splendid and lovely than any palace or garden that we know, going on from strength to strength in an ever widening circle of adventure and achievement? What man has done, the little triumphs of his present state, and all this history we have told, form but the prelude to the things that man has got to do."

We just feel tired. We feel like the oldest, most cynical skeptics in the world when we hear that because we've had two world wars since then, and we've had numerous Koreas and Vietnams, and we've watched on our TV screen some guy claim that he did 500 murders. And we, who might arguably be one of the most moral nations in the world, are aware that we've supplied the planes to the Iranians who in mad abandon are bombing apart the tankers that bring oil to us for us to build planes.

The whole world, as we look at it, looks more and more like a tale told by an idiot and we of all generations say, "Forget it. We have seen what man is. We're living 50 or 100 years after you people wrote those poems and we are in a worse state now than we have ever been in." And in fact the whole thing is being spoiled by just one thing -- by man -- that's what's spoiling it.

I think, loved ones, we're clearer than ever that there's something radically wrong with man's nature. And now, as we see each other more and more clearly by means of these great communication systems, and by means of these mass cities that we live in, we realize we're not more secure when we crowd together. We thought we would be, that's why we all crowd together -- but we're not more secure; we're less secure when we crowd together. We trust each other less when we live next door to each other than we did when we had acre lots. And suddenly we realize, "Man is radically perverted in such a fashion that he cannot do anything but destroy himself."

That's the perversion, isn't it? We've discovered that inside us we want what we want whatever it costs anybody else. And even though it means destroying ourselves, we still want what we want and that runs through all our lives -- internationally, nationally and in our own homes. And then the perversion is kind of double because now we not only want what we want, but we feel that we are right in wanting what we want. We feel we are right in getting what we want, whatever it costs anybody else and that's of course what the Bible says.

The Bible says that there is something so radically wrong with us human beings that there is no way in which it can be redeemed the way these people talked. There is no way in which it can produce this paradise. There is no way in which it can avoid producing the hell that we're beginning to have

here on earth and that verse loved ones, is one you know, it's Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?"

The heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately corrupt, and loved ones, education does not solve it. Education helps us to see the hideousness of our situation but education doesn't solve it. Education just gives us the weapons of science so that we have a more extended ability to impose our will on everybody else whatever it costs.

Actually knowing what is right and knowing what is wrong, that doesn't even solve it; that just feeds our desire to prove that we're right and everybody else is wrong. In fact, there is only one thing to do with this human nature that we see so plainly before our eyes in these days, and that is for it to be utterly and absolutely destroyed and started again in the fresh spirit of God. That's the only thing that will change it. It has to be utterly destroyed and and recreated again in the fresh Spirit of God and that's what the Gospel is. A lot of us have the feeling, "Oh no, the Gospel, brother, is forgiveness." Loved ones, we need to be changed. We don't need to be forgiven; we need to be changed.

The Gospel is 2 Corinthians 5:14, "Christ has died for all, therefore all have died." The Gospel is that every one of us have been destroyed in Jesus and raised up in him and made new. And the moment we believe that, that moment the miracle will be done in us by God's Spirit. Now those of us who are strong in faith, because that's what Paul is discussing in Romans here, the strong in faith and the weak in faith, those of us who are strong in faith, know that.

We've seen the other side of hell: we've seen the other side of hell in our own natures and we've seen the other side of hell in humanity as a whole. And we know the only thing that will change this is to blot the whole thing out and start again. The only thing that will change it is if you can destroy man and start again new.

Those of us who are weak in faith still hanker back to the old hopes: "Well maybe if you clarified what was right and what was wrong, maybe if you'd help people to understand what was right and what was wrong, then maybe they'd rise to it. Maybe that's why it's such a mess: they don't know what is right and what is wrong. They don't know that abortion is wrong or the other is right. They don't know that nuclear disarmament is right and that nuclear arming is wrong." And some of us who are weak in faith still hanker back to that.

We think, "If we can only tell them what is right and what is wrong, that'll cure it." Those of us who are strong in faith know, "Look, the problem isn't that. Sure, at times they might not be sure what is right and what is wrong, but the problem is they have to be changed so that they can do what is right." That's why Paul says what he does in this verse in Romans 14:5: "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind." Now he doesn't say one man esteems murder as different from love and another man esteems murder and love alike -- he's not saying that.

He is agreeing that there are certain things in the Bible that are plainly right or wrong: murder is wrong and love is right. And he is not saying that if you believe that man's primary problem is to be made again in Jesus death and resurrection then you'll end up being tolerant about things that are wrong, no. He is not saying that.

He is taking something about which the Bible has not made clear distinctions and he is saying, "Stop

being all preoccupied with these fine distinctions. What you need to do is be fully convinced in your own mind. Because if you get preoccupied with 'this is right and this is wrong and this is right and this is wrong', that can drag you out of your dependence on the Holy Spirit remaking you in Jesus' death and resurrection, and you can become preoccupied with moral issues."

Did you notice the way the religious movement came down with a whimper? Did you notice the development? Do you know the last strong kick that it gave? The moral majority – really; now, I am for it, but it's interesting, isn't it --the Holy Spirit was in some sense moving even in those "Jesus movement" days. There was a great mixture, I agree; some got lost in a lot of the spiritualism and a lot of the unethical behavior, but it's interesting that there was a freshness back there.

Then you remember how it went; it went into the "shepherd movement" and the "hierarchical movement" at some of the Pentecostal groups. Then gradually it gets down to "All right, we can't change the hearts of people by seeing Jesus death made real, let's change the law so that they'll have to be good."

It's interesting, isn't it? It's interesting the way we take the blessed work of the Holy Spirit and we then work it out into something that's purely political and earthly. [Martin] Luther stated very clearly: there's the power of the sword -- the power of politics -- and there's the power of the Spirit and the two are separate. And you must keep them separate because the power of the Spirit works in men's hearts. But you see the same can be true in our personal lives -- it's very easy to lose the freshness of the Holy Spirit in your life through ceasing to trust in him keeping you in Jesus' death and resurrection, which alone is what changes you day-by-day. That's alone what keeps you changed -- trusting the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment to keep you destroyed in Jesus death and recreated in his resurrection. If you take your eyes off that and you set them on, "Well this day is better than that day and this day is better than that day and you should do this and you should do that", soon you become purely a moralist. No better really than the moral rearmament people, those secular humanists, that operated in Europe for so many years.

Loved ones, that's what Paul is saying; don't major in the minors. Don't major in the minors; stop arguing about whether this day is better than that day. Don't strain at a gnat and swallow a camel; don't be straining to define exactly what is right for a Christian to do and what is wrong for a Christian to do and meanwhile lose completely your relationship with Jesus on the cross through the Holy Spirit.

Obviously what was happening in the Roman church was a debate over the Jewish Sabbath. Presumably some of them were saying, "Now the Jewish Sabbath is still something that we have to observe in order to please God." So the weak in faith were saying, "Now you must keep doing that, you must keep doing." And the strong in faith were saying, "Listen, we are kept right with God by trust in the Holy Spirit to keep us in Jesus' death on the cross and in his resurrection. That alone is what keeps us right with God. We are kept right by faith and as a result of that we may do certain things, but we don't do certain things in order to get faith. We have faith because we believe in Jesus." Some of them are coming along and saying, "No, no, you must still observe the Jewish Sabbath." And of course you know where they got it if you'd like to look at it, you'll find it in Exodus 20:8-11, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son, or your daughter, your manservant or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is

in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

Some of the Christians, the Jewish Christians and the Roman church, said, "Now that's plain; that's one of the Ten Commandments that we should observe in order to please God." While those who were strong in faith said, "No, there's only one thing we must do to please God and that is take our place in Jesus in his death and resurrection and allow the Holy Spirit to change us completely inside out." Now why did they say that? Because of verses like what you read in Matthew 12, where Jesus clarified the Sabbath and the way the Sabbath was to be regarded.

Matthew 12:8, "For the Son of man is lord of the Sabbath." Jesus said, "No, the Sabbath is to be used by God's children to do God's will; it is a day that is to sanctify all other days. It isn't the day that is to be set apart specially different; it's a day that is to sanctify all the other days to make all the other days days on which we do God's will and God's service. It's right to do good on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not just some kind of ritualistic day to be observed." And of course, that's what happened when Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.

Everybody who believed that they had been raised with him suddenly began to realize the first day of the week is a precious day for us. That's why, you remember, in Acts 20:7 for instance, in light of what Jesus said about the Sabbath, you find that they just naturally made the first day of the week their Sabbath, because that was to them their precious day.

Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week" it was Sunday, "when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them intending to depart on the morrow; and he prolonged his speech until midnight." And the first day of the week began to be the time when those who believed in Jesus rejoiced in his resurrection and they did that because just as the Holy Spirit had been poured out on even the man-servants and the maid-servants in the new Covenant whereas before it was poured out only on the kings and the prophets, so all days were to be holy unto the Lord. The Sunday was to sanctify every other day and those who were strong in faith regarded the Jewish Sabbath as the same as all the other days of the week; days when you were to do God's will and fulfill his commandments. Those who were weak in faith still wanted to cling to, "No, we'll fulfill this law and we'll please God."

Loved ones, it's the same with us; it depends which issue you're talking about. Some of you deal with drinking and smoking and to many of us it seems kind of dumb to do it. It seems you're kind of destroying your body and it seems as if you're not taking care of the temple of the Holy Ghost. But there are eating habits, there is nuclear disarmament -- there are all kinds of questions. And God's word is, "Don't argue about those things; let each man be fully convinced in his own mind." And the reason for that is you will stay in Jesus on the cross as long as you are tender with the Holy Spirit. As long as you submit sensitively to the Holy Spirit.

When you begin to turn from the Holy Spirit and you get hold of some of these ethical issues and you start making a complaint about them, do you not notice your own spirit gets coerced? Your spirit gets coerced. Do you not know that's why many of us who are involved in these campaign issues have all kinds of chaos in our homes? We have all kinds of chaos in our personal relationships because our spirit has got coarser and coarser as we more and more ignored the Holy Spirit and got hold of these rights and wrongs and this knowledge of good and evil.

In other words loved ones, it's very easy to leave the tree of life and start eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil again, and lose all the salvation that God alone can keep you in, in

his Son on the cross. So in regard to those things, don't worry about them -- don't major in the minors. Be fully convinced in your own mind that what you're doing is what the Holy Spirit wants you to do.

I don't want to carry it too far but it is really conceivable that one brother back there could be smoking 20 cigarettes a day, (and I think you're dumb if you do), but you can be smoking 20 a day and yet the Holy Spirit has not brought that before you yet because he is dealing with some other more serious problems in your heart and your life. And yet you're abiding in the Holy Spirit by the way you're living.

For somebody else the Holy Spirit could have said, "That's wrong -- I cannot keep you in Jesus on the cross if you're going to continue to smoke 20 cigarettes a day." That's the way the Holy Spirit deals with us; he deals with each of us individually and personally and that's what's so beautiful about our God and so beautiful about salvation -- it is individual. It is you responding to the blessed Holy Spirit as he gives you more and more light.

So one man estimates that all days are the same, one man esteems one day above another; let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. But don't forget you will meet that dear Savior some day and he knows whether you have responded to his indications to you. So in a real way it doesn't matter what he has told the rest of us, it doesn't. You and he have a unique relationship that none of the rest of us has, and you're responsible for your response to that.

Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you that being right with you is exactly that. It's being right with you personally, responding to the rights and wrongs that you have revealed to us in our conscience whatever other people may do or don't do. So Father we thank you that you have determined to keep everything personal between us and you. So Lord, just at this moment, we would be honest before you now.

Holy Spirit, is there anything in our lives that you have convicted us of and we are continuing to do it because everybody else seems to do it? Holy Spirit, we want to be real with you. So we will now, this moment, bring our behavior into line with our own conscience so that when we meet you, Lord Jesus, on the final day, we can stand up straight knowing that we have been true to our conscience. Then Holy Spirit, if you see us in some kind of bondage, legal bondage, over something that you have not spoken to us about, but we have followed the crowd on, we ask you now to make us aware of that and enable us to walk free from this day forward.

We thank you our Father that salvation is a joyous, personal relationship with you through the Holy Spirit. We look forward to that these coming days. Now 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.