

## The Holy Spirit Our Coach

Romans 14:6

By Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Maybe we should all start on the same verse and then you'll know what we were studying, loved ones, its Romans 14:6.

"He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God."

So Paul is saying, "Really, the big deal isn't which day you're observing or what kind of food you're eating, or whether you're a vegetarian or whether you're a meat-eater or whether you think this way or that way; if you do it as unto the Lord." In this chapter he is dealing with things that actually are given the Latin name "Adiaphora"; they're things that don't make any difference, but they're things over which we strain at gnats and swallow camels.

We Christians are expert at disagreeing like mad over little, infinitesimal points of doctrine, or infinitesimal points of behavior and yet we miss the whole heart of our position in Jesus. So that's what Paul is talking about loved ones and that's what we would like to share about together this morning for a few minutes.

I'd ask you to imagine that we're all part of the field and track team that is going to the Olympics. Some of us are sprinters and some of us are shot-putters and some of us are javelin throwers and some of us are like Eric Liddle; we do the quarter mile or we do the 100-yard dash.

So we're all meeting together here with the head coach for the first time and he says, "Tomorrow I am going to watch you all perform because I want to analyze your performance and then I want to outline a training schedule that the assistant coaches will be able to follow with each of you. Okay?"

We all go home and come back the next day and go through our routines as the coach watches us closely and then he outlines training techniques and practices for each one of us and of course they're all different because different events put different demands on all of us. You high jumpers have different demands put upon you then those of us who are hurdlers, and those of you who throw javelin have different demands from those of us who will put a shot or who do the high jump.

So we all have different demands put on us by our events. Therefore the techniques and the practices and the exercises that the coach gives to each of us are all different. There's another reason why they're all different: we're all different. Each one of us is different; there may be six or seven of us here who are hurdlers, but we all are at different stages of physical development and mental development. We're all at different stages in our training and so the coach gives us different exercises and different techniques, not only according to the events we're entering but also according to the stage of our mental and physical development. Now think what it would be like if you sprinters went over to the classes for shot putters and said to them, "I'll tell you what the head coach has given us to do: we've to do the 100-yard dash in this number of seconds. Now I really think you ought to do the same thing because if it's right for us, it's right for you."

So that massive giant of a man that puts the shot, starts trundling down the track trying to keep up to the time that the coach has set for the sprinters. Well, if the guy doesn't get a heart attack, he certainly won't, at least, be able to enter for his event! Or think if the fellow who throws the javelin went to the sprinters and said "I want to give you some of the exercises that the coach has given me to build up my shoulder muscles. Now, I want you to really work at them because obviously if they're right for me, they're right for you. That'll just make you strong too." So all the sprinters give up running and they start trying to build up their shoulder muscles.

Well, you know we'd all say, "That's dumb. I mean that's silly; it's not a case of what is right for the sprinter is right for the javelin thrower -- it's not. Or that what is right for the high jumper is right for the hurdler, it's not; they're all different. They all need different techniques and different training and different exercises and you can't apply one law right across the board for everybody.

You can't, in other words, get a set of laws and regulations and hand them out to all the hurdlers, all the high jumpers, all the long jumpers, all the javelin throwers and expect that if they all follow all of those laws, they'll all be prepared for the Olympics. You know what you would say, "There's only one right thing to do: listen to the coach, that's why we have coaches." Coaches personally adapt the exercises and the techniques to the needs that we, individually, have and that's why you have to listen to the coach.

That's why God, through Paul, speaks like this to us this morning in Romans 14:6: "He who observes the day", he who does certain exercises that are right for him, "observes it in honor of the Lord", does it in honor of the Lord. "He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord", since he gives thanks to God, "while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord" and gives thanks to God and the reason for that is found in Colossians 2:16 - 3::3, "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through it's joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, 'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch, (referring to things which all perish as they are used), according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." That's the heart of the Gospel: you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. Do not submit to this regulation and observe that law and follow that pattern and believe this way but -- you have already died and your life is hid with Christ in God.

Here is the explanation for those of you to whom that's new: our Creator put all of us in this world to bring it into a certain degree of order under his will in a way that only you can do. Now you're different from every one of the rest of us; you have some floors to wash, you have some money to count, you have some letters to type, you have some order to bring into this world that none of

the rest of us can bring. You're unique. You'll do it in a unique way and you'll express part of God's nature in a way that none of the rest of us will do. But for the sake of preserving free will, God allowed you and me to be born into families and neighborhoods and societies that had rebelled against him. They had used their free will to rebel against him and so we were born into families that trained us differently from the way God intended us to be trained. So for instance, he wanted you to use your mind to work out how to bring the particular part of the world that he had put under you, into order under his will.

But you and I, through our parents and our grandparents, through our teachers, through our bosses, have been trained to use our mind to manipulate other people, so that's what many of us do: we use our mind to manipulate other people and in the process of misusing the things and the abilities that God has given us, we've all become kind of twisted and perverted. We're like a bundle of hurdlers who have become champion pie-eaters. We're really like a bundle of athletes who have developed all the wrong way and are doing the wrong things and that's the reason we cannot do the good that we want -- that's it.

That's why we call out so often, "The good that I would I cannot do" [Romans 7], because our whole personalities have become perverted by using the gifts that God has given us for ourselves. What God has done is to change us in his son Jesus. The amazing thing is -- if God hasn't changed you from being what you are, there's no hope for you. Like that little Italian coach, [in Chariot's of Fire] said to Harold Abrahams, "Man can't put into you what God has left out."

If God hasn't put speed into you, man can't put speed into you. If God has not changed you from what you have become into what he originally wanted you to be, you can't do anything about it with all your exercises, with all your techniques, with all your training, with all your church-going, with all your Bible-reading, with all your praying. You can't put into yourself what God has left out. If you are still a miserable, self-centered creature that God has not changed, then you won't be able to change that.

If God has not put purity into you in Jesus, you cannot become pure. If God has not put love into you in Jesus, you cannot become loving. But this dear word [the Bible] says that you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. God has put you into his son and has remade you and has changed you completely and he says this: "I have sent you a coach, a counselor who can reveal to you the changes that I have made to you in my son. And this coach will begin to show you how to manifest those changes in your day-by-day life."

He says to us, "Listen to the coach. Listen to the Holy Spirit who is within you -- he will show you how God has changed you in his son." And loved ones, if you and I would do that, we'd begin to live freer lives. We would, but we are just so self-willed. Our predicament is all about us because we don't believe that. You don't believe that God has changed you in his son Jesus -- that that word is true; you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God and that if you have been united with him in a death like his, you're certainly united with him in a resurrection like his and that you have become a new creation because you are in Christ and that Christ has died for all therefore all of us have died. So many of us don't believe that, therefore we end up uncertain about ourselves and our relationship with God, and we end up trying to obey all kinds of regulations to build up our assurance.

We end up doing what we do in our secular life; we listen to everybody. We listen to everybody with their regulations and their suggestions of how we can become like God -- that's what we do in our

secular life -- you know it. I don't know if you realize it but Europe often looks at America as the land of conformity. Now, it's very paradoxical that they do because of course we're the people who say, "We're free; we're individuals." But Europe often looks at America through the eyes of Evans Packard in his early book "The Hidden Persuaders", and says, "All Americans do everything the same."

Well, I think they're wrong: they're not right, they're not fair; we are in a way still more individualistic than probably most other people, but loved ones the fact remains; we are governed by the elemental spirits of the universe so often in our secular life, aren't we? We are governed by what society tells us to do. You must admit when hoola hoops are in (hoola hooping was an exercise) we're all hoola hooping like mad! When jogging is in, we're all jogging like mad; doesn't matter what shape we are or what size we are, we are all jogging madly -- to death sometimes -- but we're jogging. It is true that we are programmed in our dear minds to so often do what society says we should do.

We laugh at those things but you know fine well that we not only admire the Michael Jacksons and the Jane Fondas but we so often end up not exercising our free will at all. We so often end up doing or trying to be like them, so that many of us have given up any fresh, spontaneous life inside ourselves at all.

We are utterly under the pressure of a money magazine telling you how you can build financial security for yourself. We're utterly under the influence of whatever happens to be the next craze. And sometimes, if you ever look into your closet, you wonder where you got all that equipment and you can almost date it! We are governed so often by what the world thinks and the tragedy is that great numbers of us in Christendom run our life with God the same way.

We forget that the heart of our salvation is that God took you, with the 25,000 idiosyncrasies and faults that you have that are different from everyone else's 25,000 idiosyncrasies and faults, and God put you into his son Jesus and he rectified all that. And he has sent you a dear coach called the Holy Spirit who will begin to whisper in your heart what part of that mighty change he wants to manifest in you today. And as you listen to that, you will find the power that God has built into you coming forth in your life.

So often in Christendom we turn away from that quiet voice within us to the noisy voices in Christendom that say, "If you're a real Christian, then you should think this about state's rights. If you're a real Christians you should think this about politics." And because we're so trained in our secular life, it's very easy to begin to run our life with God by those crude, coarse, external directives.

In other words, it's very easy to start going to the hurdler and saying, "The javelin throwers are doing this exercise, you ought to do it too," or going around to the sprinters and saying, "Now the milers are doing this -- you ought to do it too." Meanwhile there is a dear, kindly, gentlemanly person called the Holy Spirit who does speak in your heart at times. Even if you're not a Christian and you don't think of yourself as Christian, the Holy Spirit has spoken, at times, even in your heart and if you would once begin to listen to that little voice, and begin to do and follow after the things that he guides you about, you begin to find the miraculous change that God worked upon you in Jesus taking place in your life.

Loved ones, it will work for you, it will. Often the things he tells you won't be so much connected

with this practice or that practice; often they'll be finer things that nobody else knows but you. Often they won't be, "You can't go to a restaurant on a Sunday" often they'll be, "Are you going to a restaurant on a Sunday just to indulge yourself?" Or, "Are you going to express love to somebody else and to take them with you?"

Often it won't be so much, "Are you going to church every Sunday", but, "Are you going to church with a critical spirit? Are you going to church with a real loving spirit anxious to glorify God?" Often it won't be the practices, it won't be the exercises, it'll be the attitude with which you do them that the Holy Spirit begins to reveal to you and as you listen to him, he will bring you into more and more of the freedom that God has given you in Jesus.

Loved ones, that takes you well away from this argument about what to eat or what to drink. It takes you well away from those crude coarse rules and regulations that we Christians make for eating and drinking and for attending places of entertainment. Don't you see that it's true? You could stay at home in a very religious frame of mind on a Sunday and watch one of those TV movies that would fill you with more violence in your heart than anything else you can imagine and yet you would apparently be spending a very holy Sabbath day at home.

The Holy Spirit will begin to touch you with those things. He'll begin to reveal to you the ways in which -- maybe you're going out to a lake on a Sunday, it's just a wonderful thing to do, and it's God's world and you know, the whole argument that you sense God more under the sky and all that, and so going to a lake seems a wonderful thing; and then the Holy Spirit comes to your heart and says, "But you know, that was an utterly dissipated day you just had, utterly dissipated. You didn't touch alcohol at all, you didn't do anything wrong but your mind, your emotions, they're utterly dissipated. You've spent no time in recollection. You've spent no time in quietness before God, no time receiving his peace into your heart for the coming week." The Holy Spirit, always like any good coach, tunes the training and the exercises to your need precisely.

Loved ones, that's what God is getting at here: so you observe the day and I don't observe the day; you eat meat and I don't eat. You abstain from eating meat and I don't abstain from eating meat. Does it matter? They're just exercises. They won't do anything for you. If God has not put speed into you, you won't become fast. If God has not changed you in Jesus, you can't become like him. But if he has, then there's only one person who can manifest that in your life, there's only one person who can tell you what God is working on in your life today and that's the Holy Spirit; not a preacher, pastor, writer, author, not your dearest friend, only the Holy Spirit.

Loved ones, that's how personal our God is. So I'd encourage you and encourage myself to listen to that little voice within us, that voice of the Holy Spirit, and allow him to begin to refine us and make us more like Jesus deep down in our spirits. That's where we'll live in heaven forever, and there there'll be no Sabbaths and no non-Sabbaths, there there'll be no meat or vegetarian, there'll just be a spirit of love and that's what the Holy Spirit will work on in you. Let us pray.

Dear Holy Spirit, we know there is freedom in living in response to you instead of ruled by all these laws and regulations that everybody thrusts upon us. We know, Holy Spirit, that at times we've become confused over trying to do what this person said was right and trying to avoid what this person said was wrong until gradually we've lost the friendship of Jesus and we've lost the whole personal relationship with you that we had at the beginning.

We are sorry for that and Holy Spirit, we ask you now to live in us and to speak to us and to show

us what our Father is working on next in our individual lives. We so thank you that this gives us a sense of worth and value that nothing else can; that the God of the whole universe is adapting the death and resurrection of his son to me personally, Holy Spirit, thank you. We ask you to give us each light that we may become more like Jesus this day and through the days of this coming week and that we may be delivered from legalism and from all the pretence of being righteous when we are in fact self-righteous.

Father, we thank you. Thank you for changing us in Jesus and thank you for the Holy Spirit who will manifest that change in us today as we listen to him. 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.