

TO THE PURE

Romans 14:14

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Romans 14:14, "I know and I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean". Do you see the first part of the verse? "I know and I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus...". Brothers and sisters, that's the only way you can really know anything.

I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, particularly about those things that the Bible does not specifically state 'standards'. That's the only way you can know about those things. Those things that the Bible doesn't make categorical statements about, the only way you can know about those things or be fully persuaded about them whether they're right or wrong, is in the Lord Jesus.

I mean, there are certain things that are not questionable at all. The Bible says that murder is wrong and stealing is wrong and adultery is wrong and fornication and bearing false witness and anger and jealousy and worrying and anxiety, all those things are wrong. Those are clear, the Bible states that clearly. God's written word is plain and simple about those things.

But the other things that we've referred to before you remember, by that strange name "adiaphora", those things about which some Christians go this way, some Christians go that way. Some of God's children believe they're right, some of God's children believe they're wrong, about those things. The only way you can know in your own heart about those things, is in the Lord Jesus.

These are things like war. Some of God's children think that war is not justifiable at all and they're pacifists. There are others of God's children who think that war is justifiable at certain times and you ought to be ready to fight just wars. There are again, others of God's children who believe that you should fight whenever the government declares war.

Also, what do you think about alcohol? We like to think there's absolute uniformity about alcohol but there isn't, loved ones. There are many Christians who think it's all right even to get tipsy, and there are certainly many Christians who think, "It's all right to drink in moderation", and there are others of us who think, "No, you shouldn't drink at all", and yet all claim that they have a relationship with Jesus.

Then, in prayer in schools, there are some of God's children who think, "Of course, prayer in schools ought to be compulsory", and there are others who think, "No, prayer in schools should be voluntary. There should be an opportunity for children to pray if they want." But do you realize there are other Christians who believe that church and state ought to be kept absolutely separate? And they'll point to the situation in England where we've had prayer in schools very regularly since the 46th Education Act and there's probably no nation as godless maybe, at this time, as England. So, there are many Christians who will say, "You are better keeping church and state separate. Don't mix up prayer with what the state runs."

So, it's those things that we're talking about, those things about which God's children differ and yet they do honestly believe and love Jesus. Now, you remember what Paul has been saying is, "The important thing for all of us is, don't judge each other on it. Don't judge each other. Don't judge

this person and their Christianity by whether they agree with you on some of these issues or not. Don't do that. Don't take any part in judging."

You remember, he said, "Not even God judges at this present time." Judgment is reserved for one person, the pronouncing of eternal destiny on every human being is reserved for one person only and that's Jesus, the Son of God and that is on a fixed day which God has appointed. So even in these days, Jesus said, "I came not to condemn the world, not to judge it but to save it." So even for Jesus, these are saving days.

So, you remember Paul said, "Don't, for goodness sake, get yourself into judging each other on the basis of these issues as to whether you're Christians or not. These are saving days, they're not judging days", and of course some of us feel, "Oh yeah, but I mean you ought to tell people where they're wrong."

Well, you remember the Bible makes it very clear that that isn't our responsibility either. The responsibility of convicting a person of sin belongs to only one person and that's the person that is Jesus' successor. Jesus said, you remember, "When the counselor, the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of sin." So, you remember, God has told us already, "Don't judge each other and don't, for goodness sake, try to tell each other where you're wrong. Only the Holy Spirit can do that."

But, loved ones, there are other things that we are uncertain about besides those, in a way, more important things. You know the joke the husband told that when he was asked, "Are you head of your home?" He said, "I certainly am," and the interviewer said, "Well, why do you say that?" and he said, "Well, I make all the big decisions: what we're going to do in southeast Asia, what we're going to do about the economy. And my wife makes all the little decisions, which house we're going to live in, where we're going on vacation, where I will spend our salary." This is how many of us tend to get like that.

We mix up which are the important issues and we think, "Oh it's prayer and schools, that's the big issue." Or, we think it's alcohol, that's the big issue. Actually, there are many other issues about which the Bible is absolutely silent and which are far more important in our daily lives. For example, what am I going to do with my life? I try to find out what the Bible says, and the Bible doesn't specifically state what you are to do with your life.

Or, what are you going to do after you graduate? The Bible doesn't specifically address that. Or should you live with your parents or live on your own? Or, who are you going to marry, or what are you going to do for your vacation, or should you buy that car or should you buy this other car? What should you do about life insurance? Those masses of decisions that affect your life and mine are actually, in many ways, more important to us, personally, than even these other issues.

And yet God is speaking to those other issues. But it's true, loved ones. These issues that are not stated categorically in the Bible, there is only one way to know about those issues and, you know, that most of us don't know. Most of us are in the situation that Robert Frost described, you remember in his poem 'On To Two Roads'.

Most of us, in regard to this car or that car, this girl or that girl, this marriage or that marriage, this home or that home, this job or that job, this vacation or that vacation, this coat or that coat, this life insurance policy or that, most of us are in this situation. We look at them as

two roads and we say,
“And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.”

The tragedy is that most of us drift through life like that, not just about the “adiaphora”, not just about these issues that Christians disagree upon, but upon these other issues that the Bible doesn't talk about. And most of us drift. Great numbers of us don't make any decisions. We really don't. We have evaded as long as possible any responsibility for making decisions in our lives, and we just drift from one apartment to another, from one friendship to another, from one job to another. So, we have very little sense of satisfaction in life, because our life is determined almost completely by the events that happen to us or by the people that influence us, but we ourselves, don't really make many decisions about life.

Loved ones, I'd put it to your own dear hearts, isn't it true? How great numbers of us just drift, we just drift through life and we have very little sense of direction. You probably say, "Well, yeah, I know that's right but I mean doesn't everybody do that? I mean it just seems to me life just happens and I would like to make decisions. I'd like to know for certain what I ought to do about this car or what I have to do about this insurance policy or what I have to do about this job or about my marriage or about friendships, I would like to do that but I can't. I don't know what to decide."

Loved ones, there's only one way to know about those things and that's the way God has outlined through Paul. “I know and I am fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus.” That's the only way to know about those things. You can't know about them by reading newspapers, by reading books, by consulting with other people, by discussing in sensitivity groups what kind of person you are, you can't come to any certainty there because essentially, those things are “adiaphora”.

That is, they are things that are right for you alone and not for anybody else. You have a unique life here. The right job for you is the right job for you and just you, at that time. The right girl or the right guy for you is the right girl or the right guy for you at that time. The right move in the family is the right move at that time. For such things as that, there is no possibility of talking up pros and cons.

You can use your head and you can gather information and you can draw up pros and cons but the pros and cons will never bring definite decisions on those issues. That's why we call them “adiaphora”. That's why we call them things about which there's not any right or any wrong. It is something that you have to decide yourself personally. The only way to do it is 'I know and I am fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus.’

Maybe you say, "Well, that leaves me right out of it because I am not, as far as I know, in the Lord Jesus or at least, I don't know what Paul means when he says that. And I just have no understanding of how to know something in the Lord Jesus. So I am afraid I am just not mystical enough for this knowing that you are talking about. All I can do is carry on as I am doing. I am not one of those who are in the Lord Jesus.” You are. You are in the Lord Jesus. I'll show you. It's Ephesians, loved ones, if you'd look at it.

Ephesians 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." We, here, every one of us, are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which He has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. There isn't one of us here who has not been made by Jesus, "because by Him, all things were made and without Him was not anything made that was made", we were all made by Jesus. You remember the amazing verse that follows that is, "All that was life, all that is, was life in Him."

All of us came from Jesus. All of us have a little flame of life that keeps our hearts beating from Jesus' own life. We were made of His life and we were made by him and then, we were remade by God, in Jesus, when the Father renewed the whole human race. So, all of us here have been created in Christ Jesus.

All of us have been put in Him and I know you have a tendency to sit there and say, "Pastor, you're assuming that all of us here are Christians, or we're the kind of Christian that you're talking about, but we're not." Surely, surely, you're talking about people who believe. The people who believe, they're in Christ Jesus." No. It's amazing. Everybody is in Christ Jesus.

Whether you believe or you don't believe, you are in Christ Jesus. Now if you're about to stand up and say, Heresy, heresy. I'll nail my 95 theses to the door here. Will you look at it, loved ones? It's 2 Corinthians 5 and it is a blessed verse you know and a liberating verse for any dear soul who just is lost.

2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died." Now loved ones, you can read that, however terrible it may seem to you and however blasphemous, because we are convinced that one has died for Charles Manson, [a serial killer] therefore Charles Manson has died. Because we are convinced that one has died for that man whoever he was that was guilty of the sexual perversion with the children, that One has died for that man, therefore that man has died. Because we are convinced that One has died for Hitler, therefore Hitler has died and therefore the other verses are applicable in verse 16.

2 Corinthians 5:16, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one" -- neither Hitler, nor Charles Manson, nor the man who has just murdered someone in New York -- we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore if anyone -- that's everyone because we regard no one from the human point of view and Christ has died for all therefore, all have died, therefore if anyone, which is everybody -- "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come."

Every one of us in this world has been made by Jesus and has been miraculously placed by God into Jesus and remade in Christ and resurrected in Him new and whole and well with the old passed away. If you say to me, "Well why, then, am I not experiencing this knowing that Paul obviously had when he says, 'I know and I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus,' why am I not experiencing that?" Because you don't count day-by-day on the fact that you are in Jesus.

You don't count on that. You don't count on it. You don't treat yourself as being in Jesus. You don't believe you are in Jesus. You believe a lie that you are not in Jesus. You believe a lie that your old man or your old woman and that's all you've got going for you. You don't believe that you are in Jesus. You don't believe what God has done for you and in Jesus to you. So, you don't experience what Paul experienced.

The moment you believe that, and it's simply reality. It's like me saying to you, "Look, there's air

in this room, breathe it", and you breathe it because the air is all around you. The moment you believe it, you're in the middle of it and the moment you believe that, something happens that the Bible describes in Romans 8:16.

Romans 8:16, "It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." The moment you believe that, air, fresh air from God's heaven, blows in upon you. The air of his Holy Spirit. And that Holy Spirit makes part of you alive that has been dead for years and that part is your own spirit. In your own spirit is your conscience. The Latin word for conscience is "conscientia" - meaning "I know very well". Not just knowing, but I know absolutely. Your conscience is stirred by the Holy Spirit of God and he begins to pass on to you, the things that God wants you to do in your life. You, then, begin to know about these things because you begin to have a spirit from within you that senses what to do.

It's no longer your dear old mind totting up endlessly the pros and cons of this job or that job. It's maybe useful to do that, it's maybe useful to have the stuff there, but all you can do, loved ones, is do what a computer does. A computer can store the information and can sort it and it can sort it a thousand different ways. You put the pros and cons for some job in, you put the pros and cons for some vacation in, you put the pros and cons for some guy or girl that you're going to marry in and you put the pros and cons for where you're going to live in, and that little mind computer can sort that in all kinds of ways. It can give you a different answer every day, that's why you're never at peace.

That's why you're always coming up with uncertainty all the time because the mind is purely a little computer. It just tosses things around, sorts them in different ways, gives you reasons for doing different things and it can tell you a hundred different things that you could equally well do and it can back them up with reasons, but the only part of you that can know, is your conscience. In most of us, our conscience is so dead and so unused and we've got so used to following what other people say with our minds that our conscience is unable to get any signals up to us at all about what the Creator of the world wants us to do.

Loved ones, the only way to change that is to accept at last that you are in Jesus like the rest of us and that He will send a Spirit of His Son into you the moment you believe that and your spirit will come alive and you'll begin to know what you should do in this life. You'll begin to sense by your intuition and by your conscience where you should go, what you should buy, what way you should go in your marriage. But if you don't do that, you'll be continually at a loss as to how to run your life.

What does Paul say? Well, you remember the rest of the verse, he says, "I know and I am fully persuaded." It's Romans 14:14, "I know and I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean." Now it's a great liberty that he brings to us.

No question about murder, adultery, those things are unclean, the Bible clearly states that. Fornication, stealing, bearing false witness, the Bible makes it clear those things are unclean. But whether you should eat meat or whether you should eat vegetables, or whether you should observe a Sunday or observe a Saturday, or whether you should support the arms race or oppose the arms race, or whether you should do this with your life or that with your life, Paul says, "I know and I am fully persuaded in the Lord Jesus that it doesn't matter one way or the other. That all those things are clean." Then you say, "Then it doesn't matter what I decide?" Oh yeah, it does. You may say,

"Well no, I mean if everything's clean then I can just toss a penny and marry the girl that is indicated by the penny or I can just do anything, if it's all clean." No. It's unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean.

The Holy Spirit expresses to you what God wants you personally to do and that for you is cleanness. He brings home to your heart expressly what He doesn't want you to do, for you, that is uncleanness. It may differ, even according to what stage you are in your life. Some things He may tell you at this point in your life and He'll tell you different things later on, but those things are the clean and unclean things for you and you have to follow those. You have to walk to a different drummer from all the rest of us.

You have to walk in accordance with your dear Savior Jesus and the voice of His Spirit within you. As you walk that way, your life will begin to take on an order that is beautiful and harmonious. No, you can't just decide anything. You have to listen to him and walk carefully with him. How does that work? Oh, I'll show you the amazing truth, loved ones. It's in 1 Corinthians 2. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, "But as it is written, 'what no eye has seen' -- regarding a Sunday or a Saturday, regarding meat or vegetables, regarding the person you're going to marry, regarding your job, regarding your investments -- 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of the man which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

The Spirit of God searches God's heart in regard to your life and then He gives you the result of that searching in your spirit. He lets you know personally from your Creator what your Creator wants you to do. That's why the Bible says the spiritual man is judged by no one. Nobody else can judge you because nobody else knows what God has said to you. Nobody knows what God has said to you. That's what it says there, you remember, in verse 15.

1 Corinthians 2:15, "The spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct Him?" In other words, nobody can come to you on these things that the Bible does not make explicit statements about and say, "Now, the Lord has told you that", because you alone know what the Lord has told you. So, no one can judge you for that. But you're responsible for beginning to get God's mind on those things. Loved ones, you are.

Jesus died for you and you died with him and he has a whole plan for your life. He has all kinds of set things that he has planned for you to do, good works which he has prepared beforehand that you should walk in them. He is able to let you know what those are, if you at last count on the fact that you are in Jesus, that you have been raised with him, and that his Spirit is alive inside you. If you believe that, if you have faith, then that Holy Spirit will begin to speak through you and will begin to give you certainty about these things.

So, really, would you stop listening so much to all the noise out here? Would you stop trying to find the answer in all the books and the working of your dear mind, and all the counseling? You know, all they can do is maybe confirm something, that's about all they can do. Those things may be useful for that but apart from confirming something that God has already given you yourself, they only confuse you.

Loved ones, it's your life. It's pretty important and you know as well as I do, there are hundreds of things like this that you're just letting go by default. But this is your life. This is one time

through, just once and then it's finished. It's vital that you find out from your God what he wants you to do in these things.

So I would encourage you, set a listening post in your life. Do set up a listening post. Sometime during each day, when you will be quiet before your God, and you will exercise faith that you are in Jesus, and you will ask him by his Spirit to speak to you. Set up a listening post for three or four or five minutes each day. If you begin to do that, you'll soon be spending more time until you begin to get clear in your mind, God's picture for your life. Why? Because there's only one way to know for certain about these things, the way Paul said, "I know and I am persuaded in the Lord Jesus". I pray that you'll begin that. Let us pray.

Dear Father, almost every one of us would have to confess before You that we drift. We drift about many things. We let things go because we don't know what else to do. We leave decisions unmade because we think by that means, we'll avoid the responsibility of the consequences and yet our life seems more like a whimper. It seems to drift and drag from one day to the next. Lord, we know that isn't the plan.

So, Father, we do believe Your word that Christ died for all, therefore all died, and that we too died with Him and if we are in Christ, we are new creations and the old has passed away and the new has come. Lord Jesus, we choose this day to believe that and we trust You to send Your Spirit who is the seal of our belief into our hearts that we may begin to know what Your plan for our life is and we may begin to make decisions about these things that we are not clear on.

Lord, we commit ourselves to You to begin to have a listening post each day in our lives where we start to listen for Your voice within. We ask this that our lives may count for something and that You may see what You've made and be pleased and that we may fulfill the dream You had for us at the beginning, in Jesus' name.

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.