

WHOSE SLAVE ARE YOU?

ROMANS 6:16

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Have you ever heard of the secret of eternal youth? Have you ever heard of that phrase, 'the secret of eternal youth'? Some people talk about it as the elixir of life. The Latins talked about it as aqua vitae. Every literature in the world contains some myth that recounts the story of some hero searching for the elixir of life, searching for some fountain of water that will enable you to go on living forever or that will bring all life into harmony.

It's amazing that countries actually have been discovered by explorers who weren't looking for the country, but were looking for this secret of eternal youth, this aqua vitae. Every literature in the world contains myths about it. The amazing thing is that these corrupted memories that our forefathers had that there was at one time a secret of eternal youth, that there was at one time some power that would bring all life into harmony and would enable life to be without pain or without disease and without defeat.

The amazing thing is that that corrupted memory of theirs did point to the fact that our Creator once did offer us a spirit life that if we received it, would make everything work in harmony. It is interesting you know that in that situation it's true that there is no smoke without fire.

We often, I think as we read the Greek and Roman myths, thought, "Oh, that's foolishness. There's no such thing." Or, we saw Midas and how he touched everything to gold and we sensed, "Oh, there's no such thing as that, there is no magic power." It's interesting brothers and sisters that the literatures of the world are recounting a corrupted memory that was passed on down by Adam to his sons and his sons and his sons that there was at one time such a gift offered to men.

You remember that we've often talked about the real record of that offer that is in this book (the Bible). God did offer to us a spirit life, an uncreated life that was better than our physical and psychological life. And this life that he offered us was the very life that flowed through him and his own Son. And actually it contained all the powers and qualities that he and his Son possessed. God did offer us that life. He offered it to us so that if we received it, we would find that our own lives would go harmoniously and would just express spontaneously the beauty of God.

You remember that we rejected it. We decided that we would rather decide what was right and wrong by the psychological life and the physical life that we possessed. And so we rejected completely God's offer of this spirit life. The result was disaster. We found that we didn't in fact know what was right and what was wrong. We found that even when we did suspect what was right, we weren't able to do it by the power of our own physical and psychological life.

Moreover, we discovered that when we rejected this offer that had been made to us of this spirit life (or this secret of eternal youth or this aqua vitae that would make everything go right in our lives), we discovered that when we rejected that, a tremendous guilt settled upon us. We found that we were involved more and more in using our psychological and physical life to try to get rid of that guilt. We found ourselves enslaved by desires to prove ourselves and to gain acceptance from our peers to try to dull the sense of guilt that we had, that came from refusing this original offer.

So many of us found ourselves involved day-by-day in just fulfilling needs that we had, fulfilling needs that we had to be accepted by our peers, fulfilling needs that we had to be recognized and to be approved of to be praised. We became so enslaved to the physical and psychological needs that we had, the financial needs that we had, the social needs that we had, that today there are few philosophers or psychologists who will say that we are anything but slaves. That is the point that we have come to.

We rejected this uncreated life because we wanted to be free from depending on any person or any power other than ourselves. The paradox is that we have resulted in being utterly dependent on all kinds of people for approval, on all kinds of people for our success or our finances or the supply of our food. So today, most philosophers and psychologists, if they do not express it in as extreme a form as Skinner does who says that man is not free and is not capable of being free, at least they say that we are most of the time slaves to needs and drives that our physical and psychological life produces.

Now brothers and sisters, we shared before that we got ourselves into such a bewildered mess that God saw we had lost all sense that life could be different at all. And so he started from Noah and began to set forth in the minds of different men, the kind of behavior and the kind of experience that would have resulted if we had received this eternal life.

He began to explain and describe the kind of behavioral experience that would result if you received this secret of eternal youth or if you received this aqua vitae. He would say, "Now listen if you would receive this life, or if you had received it, you would not commit adultery. If you received this life, you wouldn't steal, if you received this life, you wouldn't tell lies about your neighbors."

God knew that this life would give us such a sense of oneness with Himself that we wouldn't need to tell lies about our neighbors in order to get somebody else to approve of us or to have a special kind of confidence with us. He went on to give what are really laws of the action of the spirit life. Just as there are laws of gravity that tell you how certain heavy objects behave inside the earth's atmosphere, so he began to describe through different men at different times the kinds of ways that this life would show itself if it was ever received by a man or a woman.

So he said if you receive this life, you'll love people and you'll have real joy deep down. You'll have real peace. These are automatic results of this life once you receive it. So these became known as the laws of the spirit of life. God gave us these laws brothers and sisters so that we would recognize that there was a kind of power that could enable us to live differently from the way we were living.

Now, the amazing thing is that he performed a miracle for us. He not only told us the way this life would behave if we ever received it but for a reason that none of us can understand, instead of turning away from us and letting us destroy each other with our desire for psychological and physical satisfaction, instead of letting us consume each other, he actually took that selfish will of ours (that had decided to do without this elixir of life and to depend only on itself) and he put that selfish will into his Son Jesus, and he destroyed it.

Now, that was a miracle, a cosmic miracle that God performed in a timeless, spaceless area called eternity. What we have discovered is, it's possible for us to have that miracle made real in our own

lives by simply believing that our selfish will and our right to a selfish will was destroyed in Jesus 1900 years ago. It's possible for us to have that selfish will neutralized inside us. It's possible to have that spirit of independence destroyed inside us by God. It's possible for us again to have a second chance of receiving this secret of eternal youth, this aqua vitae or this supernatural uncreated life that God originally offered to us.

When you receive that life, the Bible talks about you as living under grace. That's because it is just God's sheer grace and generosity that he offers it to us a second time. And when you receive it and live under it, that's called living under grace. Now, dear ones, I think that explanation will help you to understand why Paul answers such a categorical "No" to the question that is posed in Romans 6:15 which we looked at last day, if you'd just glance at it.

Romans 6:15, "What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" Paul says, "That's absolutely stupid to ask that question. The opposite is true. If you're under grace and you have this supernatural uncreated life flowing through you, you actually can't sin because laws that we have here are laws that describe the life of the spirit. If you receive this spirit, then this spirit spontaneously and automatically exhibits those laws."

So Paul says it's stupid to say, "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?" Paul says, "Because you're under grace, because you have this life flowing through you, you can't sin. You'll find yourself automatically obeying the laws that God has given us down through the years to describe the life that this spirit produces."

In other words, Paul is saying, that the only people who can sin are those who are under law, those who are trying to live up to the standards that describe the life of the spirit on their own without the spirit being in them. He says, "Those people can't avoid sinning. It doesn't matter how hard they try, they're sitting right under law. They're trying to live up to those standards without the Holy Spirit. They can do nothing but fail."

Loved ones, it would be the same difficulty you would have putting on this Irish accent that I have. You'd have to strain to get it, wouldn't you? Some of you could do it better than others but on the whole it would be a strain. It would not come naturally to you. But I have Irish blood running through my veins. I have Irish life running through my whole body, so it's no strain for me. Indeed I can't talk like you no matter how much I try.

So that's the difference. If you have this life running through you, you can't avoid exhibiting the symptoms and the characteristics of this life. But if you don't have this life, it doesn't matter how hard you try, you're going to be living under law. The truth is that law is not a thing that God intends us to strain and strive to obey. Law is something that he wants us automatically and spontaneously to obey just because it is the law of the spirit of life. And if you have the spirit of life, that spirit of life will behave in a way that the law describes it to behave.

Now you might say, "Okay, is there a situation in physical life that would express that?" Yes, I think there is. If you buy an air conditioner and the owner's manual describes the performance of the air conditioner on the basis of 220 volt current but you have 110 volts, then it doesn't matter how that air conditioner strains and strives it will not perform up to the level of the standards that are set in the owner's manual unless you have the right power flowing through it. Now that's what it's like with us.

Now to take a step further into today's verse, you might ask, "Is it as automatic as that? If we reckon ourselves to be dead to self and if we make no provision for independent life and for exercising our own rights and our own pride and we bank on God's life coming through us, will it automatically happen that we'll obey God's laws? If we come through some kind of crisis event or some kind of momentary consecration of ourselves to Jesus and a readiness to die with him, will it automatically happen that from then on in our lives, the laws of the spirit of life will be expressed through us?"

Dear ones, the answer has to be no. You can have the 220 volt current available and you can have the air conditioner present but you have to switch the air conditioner on each day. You have to have some kind of thermostat that will switch it on at a certain temperature each day. It does have to be switched on daily. Indeed with an air conditioner it's more than a daily switching on and off.

The power is available and the air conditioner is plugged into that power. You reckon yourselves dead to self and alive to God and you bank on God's life. You take that position in your attitude to the Father. But there is need for a daily switching on of that power. That's really what Paul is trying to emphasize to us today. It's not enough to get into the position where you say, "Yes, I have been filled with the Holy Spirit and I am willing to let him do what he wants with me", and then to sit back passively as some of us do and say, "All right Holy Spirit, you just reproduce Jesus' life inside me. I'll just sit here."

The result of that is unscriptural mysticism and an approximation to the whole Guru practice of the eastern religions. It is not just a matter of sitting back passively and saying, "Well, I have taken my stand, now Holy Spirit you do the rest." Brothers and sisters, it is necessary to obey the Holy Spirit day-by-day and moment-by-moment in your life. It's necessary to submit to him moment-by-moment otherwise you will not see the laws of the spirit of life exhibit it in your own life.

It's very important for us to see that it's not enough to die to yourself and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is essential to obey the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment and day-by-day, if he is going to exhibit in you the laws of the spirit of life. Now that's what Paul is saying in today's verse if you look at it.

Romans 6:16, "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?" In other words, there is a tendency for some of us to say, "Well, I have entered into the fullness of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't matter too much about the odd wrong choice, does it?"

Indeed, some say, "We don't have the right to choose. We just find the Holy Spirit coming through us like a tremendous power and we just can't resist him. We end up being loving even though we don't want to be." No loved ones, the Holy Spirit frees you from the desire to stand up for self. He frees you so that you can choose day-by-day, but you still need to choose. You need to choose to love instead of hate. You don't need to struggle against the hatred like you used to do but you still need to choose to love.

You still need to choose to obey Jesus. You don't need to struggle to obey him but you do need to choose. There's a tendency for some of us to say, "Surely if we are filled with the Holy Spirit and we have died to self that's all that matters." The odd wrong choice doesn't matter.

Loved ones, Paul is saying, the odd wrong choice may not bring eternal death to us but it will in fact bring something of death into our lives. That's what he's saying in Romans 6:16. "Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin which leads to death or of obedience which leads to life?"

Paul says, "Why obey sin if you've been freed from sin? Why not obey the Holy Spirit all the time if you've been freed to obey him? The point he is really making in verse 16 is, "If you don't do that, if you don't become a slave to the Holy Spirit and obey him moment-by-moment and day-by-day, how can you tell when you've crossed the line from being his slave back into being a 'self-slave'?"

When do you cross that line? I think a lot of us say, "Pastor, you can't avoid the odd sin." All right, you can't avoid the odd sin. Maybe the odd sin God can deal with if your conscience is still soft enough to repent and your will is still strong enough to submit to God. God will forgive you for the odd sin. But Paul is saying even the odd sin is a serious matter because your every odd sin makes you more and more a slave to that sin. Every odd sin brings something of death into your life.

I was concerned about the importance of that statement and anxious to see what the other theologians would say. The Lutheran theologians would tend to say, "Well, you can't avoid sinning, it's just part of life. You have to face it and you just can't get over it." Lensky, is one of the commentators that I use and he is a Lutheran. He makes this comment on Romans 6:16, "Paul does not say that by committing sin while being under grace and not under law, Christians would at once change masters and adopt the sin, their former tyrannical ruler and leave God, their blessed liberator." So, that's true.

It doesn't mean that one sin and you cease to be a child of God. "These Christians want to remain under grace and God but they imagine that grace is not averse to their committing sin on occasion." It's interesting to hear a Lutheran saying that because so often we like to take some of Martin Luther's other quotations.

He has some strong ones that are against sin. But we like to take some of the other ones and quote them out of context and pretend that you can't avoid sinning in act, word and thought everyday in life. Well, here is a Lutheran theologian saying, "They do not desire the old tyrant, the sin. They think that they may indulge in some measure of sin." But then he says even this is impossible. He then goes on to say, "By obeying some sin or other, we would make ourselves slave to such sin and this is by no means harmless because if we be for death, namely spiritual and eternal death. Presenting ourselves for obedience and obeying implies voluntary and conscious stooping to some sin. We ought to recognize the fact that the result of this is death. Every sin of this kind has death in it." And that's the point loved ones.

You won't lose your eternal security or you won't lose your life with God but brothers and sisters, Paul is saying every sin brings death in some form into your life. Of course he is making the other point that there comes a tricky time when you have to decide, "Am I being a slave to sin more often than I am being a slave to Jesus?" And that's a difficult thing to come into.

In Ireland, most of us have some kind of scar tissue on our lungs from the tuberculosis virus because of the climate and because we didn't work on tuberculosis as early as you did here in the States. I presumably have some on my lungs as a result of the T.B. virus. The thing is not fatal to

me and is not killing me. I can breathe and I am not spitting up blood all the time, yet still the marks of the scar tissue are there on my lungs. Now that's it -- every disease brings something of death into your body.

Every sin brings something of spiritual death into your life. It brings something of separation from God. Every time you tell a lie, it brings some bit of uncertainty and insecurity between yourself and God or yourself and a friend. Every time you rebel against God, you have a little more difficulty with prayer the next day. Every time you miss Bible study in a day, that day is a little more empty.

In other words, every sin brings something of death into you. And that's what Paul is saying. "All right, when do you cease to be a slave of God and when do you commit so many individual sins that you're in reality a slave of Satan?" It's important for you see to see that. I remember waking up with a jolt one day when I realized that Jesus was not my Lord. I used to say, "Jesus is my Lord. He is my master", but I suddenly found he wasn't.

I was his Lord. I was his master. I called him in as my servant whenever I needed him. Whenever I was up against difficulties, I called Jesus in. Then I sent him away. I saw the same thing that I shared with you about teaching. If you're a teacher in a class and there's one happy little soul at the back who only obeys you when it's convenient for him then he doesn't care about you too much. If it's convenient for him, he obeys you; if it's not convenient he doesn't obey you.

I suddenly saw, I am not his master. I am not his teacher. He is my master and he is my teacher because he only obeys me when it's convenient. Now, brothers and sisters, a slave is one who has no rights to his own way, no rights to his own success or his own enjoyment or his own power or his own profit. He is a slave to Jesus and that is the only safe place – to be in a loving, willing, joyous slavery to the Holy Spirit.

Somebody has said an instantaneous obedience to the Holy Spirit is the only way to begin to exhibit the laws of the spirit of life in your own life. You may sit there and say, "Oh, slave, slave, I don't want to be slave." Loved ones, you're either a slave of one or the other.

You're either a slave of self or a slave of a bank account or a slave to your reputation or a slave to the success you want to have in life or you're a slave to one who loves you and who will be kindly and gracious to you because you've offered yourself as a slave to him. I can guarantee you that Wall Street will not be that kind to you. I can guarantee you that the ordinary, earthly employer will not be that kind to you. The bank account is not that gracious to you.

So really, it's a question of deciding whose slave are you? Are you a slave day-by-day of this Holy Spirit that you have allowed to fill your life? Do you choose consciously what he is prompting you to choose moment-by-moment or are you in fact a slave, part of the time, to self, to success and to reputation? That phrase 'part of the time' is an ambiguous phrase because when do you decide when the slave changes masters?

So really loved ones, it is important. Is there any question?

Q & A: Yes, I agree with you. I think some things are to be obeyed and not discussed. Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, we thank you that you are willing to give us day-by-day instructions. We thank you too

Holy Spirit that coming into death to self and being filled with you does not mean losing our right to choose, it rather means that you bring us into a place where we are at last free to choose, something we were never free to do before.

So Holy Spirit, we thank you that you have not stolen from us our human freedom. Rather you have given it back to us. Now Holy Spirit we see that it is our responsibility and privilege day-by-day to choose what you guide us to do. In that way we choose to become your slave until we come to the place where we do not question you, even where you guide us beyond our own understanding or comprehension.

We thank you Holy Spirit that that is your plan for us and we look forward to executing it in our lives today and this coming week for your glory. Amen.