

## Intellectual or Volitional Conviction

Romans 7:13

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

This last week, some of us went out to get into our cars at 5 o'clock, at the end of the day, and to our absolute disgust, we found tickets on all the windshields. And suddenly we realized that there had always been one hour limit parking signs on that street, which we had never noticed before. And you can guess the kind of reaction. You kind of feel, "What right have they to put one-hour limit signs on our parking street?" And you kind of feel, "Well, they know fine well that there's very little on-street parking available in this area. And they know that what there is is prevented by the road construction. And there is limited off-street parking. So, what right have they to do this to us?" And really, we often react that way, don't we?

When the old ego finds anything at all that is inconveniencing it, it tends to react with the attitude, "Why should they do such a silly thing as this?" And if you think of it, that extreme egocentricity is kind of characteristic of our society, isn't it? I mean it's a very contemporary attitude to any standard or any practice that brings us any kind of unrest or guilt. We are very prone to immediately attack the standard and say, it has no right to do that.

Really, if you think of it -- Oh even in educational methodology today -- there's a great tendency towards eliminating any standard or any practice that makes the child feel, in any way, that he is wrong. And you know in ethics and behavior it's very fashionable to say that the old principles of chastity and honesty and purity brought all kinds of guilt and inhibitions and inferiority complexes to our forefathers. And really those things need to be thrown out and we'll get rid of our guilt with them.

In a sense loved ones if you reflect, it's a very contemporary attitude to feel that any guilt, any feeling of falling short that we experience, is something that we ought not to be asked to face. And we really have every right to get rid of anything that gives us that kind of feeling. And in a sense you know, we're kind of becoming hedonists in our behavior.

Hedonism, you remember, is the belief that Tiny Tim [an entertainer] expounded: If it feels good, do it. Whatever makes you feel good, that's what is right. Whatever gives you pleasure, that's the right thing to do. You must admit that there is a strong trend among us in these days to kind of feel that. If it gives me a good feeling, it must be right. And if it gives me a bad feeling, it must be wrong, and we ought to get rid of it.

Now, it's the fallacy in that kind of thinking that Paul is attacking in this verse that we're looking at today. So maybe you'd look at it and you could see it for yourself. It is Romans 7:13(a).

"Did that which is good then bring death to me?" That is the law, you see. Paul had just finished saying, "God's law is good and holy and just". "Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good."

In other words he is saying, "Is it the law that makes me feel miserable? Is it the law that brings me into an experience of death and darkness and failure? No, no, it's the thing that the law exposes." In other words, it isn't the parking signs that make me feel bad, it's the attitude inside

that is indifferent to the needs of other people who want to park. That's what causes the problem. It isn't the law that brings us this sadness or death. It's the egocentricity inside and the self-assertiveness that so often takes over our lives completely. That's the thing that, in a sense, kills us, that in a sense brings us into death. It's not really the laws.

In fact, when we oppose the whole idea of law, or we start kicking against the side of the cot, like a little child, to try to make it fall down, the problem is in the attitude inside us, not on the sides of the cot that keep us in. And really that's what Paul is getting at, you know, that it's not the law that brings death to us. It's not the law that takes the control of our lives out of our own hands and puts it in the hands of selfish, assertive drives of irritability and anxiety and lust. It's the thing inside us that does that. The law itself actually is blameless.

I am sure we need to see that in our attitudes to different standards and principles. But you might say, "Yeah, but brother, then why do we so often end up blaming the law? Why do we end up blaming the law for the guilt we feel, or for the depression we feel, or for the atmosphere of inadequacy that fills our lives?"

Well dear ones, I think it's because, only when we begin to confront the law, does the self-assertion and the self-will inside us appear as the tyrant that it is. I think that's it. I think the thing is there all the time, but we're not so aware of it, until we begin to confront the law. And then that self-will inside us appears to us as a tremendous tyrant that we cannot get hold of. And it's our awareness of that, that suddenly brings us into defeat and into depression and into guilt.

That's why we so often blame the law for it -- because it was our confrontation with the law, it was whenever the law began to contradict our own lives, that we suddenly became aware, there is a self-will in me that is massive and is like a monster inside. And I cannot do anything with it.

Really, I think a lot of us, kind of get into this trick of blaming the wrong thing. We can often come here Sunday after Sunday, and really enjoy meeting with other people who have kind of seemed to get the bugs out of their own relationship with God. And they seem to be kind of enjoyable people to be with. And we come Sunday after Sunday, and we enjoy the atmosphere, and we enjoy the sense of love and care that there is. But then the law begins to contradict some of the things that are existing in our own lives. And suddenly we become aware, "There are some things in me that aren't right." And we begin to resist the law on those points. And then the next steps are obvious.

We say to ourselves, "You know I was enjoying this until all this emphasis on law. And now the emphasis on law has brought about guilt inside in me, and even more self-assertiveness, and self-will than I have ever had in my life before. I have to get away from this. I have to get away from it. I want to get that law out of my head so that I don't have to deal with this."

Of course loved ones, it's utterly irrational. It's just an utterly illogical reaction, because of two things -- suppose the logicians will have to see this in the abstract first. But, because two things are concomitant, does not imply that there is a causative relationship between them. The fact, that two things occur at the same time, does not prove that one has caused the other. The fact that you have begun suddenly to begin to be aware of the law, and the ways that it demands that you walk, and the fact that guilt and self-assertiveness seem to be also coming up within you, does not mean that the one caused the other.

And you know that in regard to a disease. I mean you agree with that in regard to a sickness. If you think of going to a doctor to have your blood tested. And he analyses your blood, and he discovers that there is just an increase in the number of white cells, and he diagnoses Leukemia. You don't go home and say, "I wish I hadn't had that blood analysis. It has given me a disease." You know that. You know fine well that the analysis did not cause the disease. You know the thing was there all the time. It's simply that you under-rated the symptoms that were occurring in your own life. And you didn't realize how deadly it was, until you began to have it analyzed by someone who knew and could tell you.

In fact, you know what your attitude is. Your attitude is, "I know this thing was there all the time and I am glad of this analysis. I am glad that I know now the deadly power that I have inside me. And I want any help I can get. Yes, Doctor, if you can do more analysis, if you can do anything else that will show me any other symptoms of the disease in my life, I want that. I want all the help I can get."

Now loved ones, do you see it's the only sensible, logical attitude to take towards this self-will in your own life, and the work that the law does in exposing that self-will? See, you come here Sunday after Sunday. And God's law begins to bear in on you. And you begin to discover, "Yeah, I am irritable with my wife. Yeah, I do get angry with my room-mate. Yeah, I am being less than honest in my business."

Loved ones, it is madness to try to throw the parking signs away. It is madness to say, "I don't want any more of this emphasis on law. I want to know that God loves me." He does love you anyway, despite what the law is saying about you. But don't say, "I want graciousness. I want love. I want forgiveness."

Should you not rather say, "Lord, if this thing is inside me, bear in upon me. Show me any more of your laws that cross my life. At all cost, show me every part of this deadly disease that is inside, because up to now, I have been underrating the symptoms of this thing. And this disease of self-will has been bringing me into more and more death to You, and more and more death to the other people in the world. And I want rid of it. And I want no longer to protect it and defend it."

Now, loved ones, maybe some of you might say, "Well yeah, I can see that. But why does the law have to be so painful? Why does it have to hurt so much when the law comes down and contradicts my life and deals with my self-will?"

Well, loved ones, it has to hurt, because you will not give up that self-will until you see how deadly it is. The law has to show you how ridiculous and how bad that independence of God is, that occurs in your life. The law has to show that, that resistance to God's will that is inside you, is bringing you into absolute death to God and death to everybody else. Otherwise you will never get rid of it.

See, there are only two possibilities. Either God's will rules your life or self-will rules your life. Those are the only two. We bluff ourselves and we like to think, "Oh no, a little bit of one, a little bit of the other is a good mixture. And it's good to kind of keep them going against one another." It's not. It's either one or the other. Either God's will rules your life or self-will rules your life. And you're the only one who can give up self-will. And God is the only one who can exercise His will in your life.

And, dear ones, that's important, because I think, often -- with due respect to the Christian psychologists and psychiatrists among us -- I think often psychology and psychiatry has impressed upon us the lie that we cannot give up our self-will, that it's something too big. But, loved ones, that's the truth: that you're the only one who can give up your self-will and lay it on the cross. God is the only one who can exercise His will in your life.

That's why the law has to persuade you that the thing inside you is absolutely deadly. It is poisonous. It's destroying your life completely. And unless you let it go onto the cross of Christ, it will take any consciousness of God that you now have out of your life. And it will eventually block you off from every other human being in the world.

Now I know a lot of us kind of react to that. And I know a lot of your hearts are saying, "But brother, I've tried, I've tried. I want to get rid of the self-will. I want to. That's not fair of you to say it -- that if once I saw how deadly it was, I would be able to let go of it. I've tried to get rid of it. I want to do that more than anything else in the world but I cannot."

Loved ones, would you just look with me at two scriptural principles that contradict that. You'll find one in John 10:18.

"No one..." Jesus is speaking, remember, "No one takes it from me." That's "My life..." you remember. He says in John 10:17, "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again." "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father." Now loved ones, that's the spiritual principle that God follows in his dealings with us.

He cannot take our life away from us. God cannot take from any human being, even His only begotten Son, he cannot take from any human being, what that human being is not willing to let go of. Now, truly, dear ones, I know you can pray, "Lord, make me willing." But loved ones, you have to be willing to be made willing. God cannot take your self-will from you. You have to be willing to let go of it. He can fill you with his own will, but you have to be willing to let go of your self-will. And the job of the law, of course, is to make that self-will so poisonous to you that you want to let go of it, and you're willing to let go of it. But loved ones, it's wrong to say, "You cannot lay down your self-will." Honestly it is.

It's right for you to say that you cannot maintain that consistently day after day in your own life. Only the Holy Spirit can do that, but you can come to a time where you lay it down. Indeed, you have to come to that time, because it's a spiritual principle that you must lay down your life. No one can take it from you. You must let go of that self-will.

I think a lot of us, you see, are in agony over all kinds of sins in our lives, over, oh, sexual things, human relationship things, roots of bitterness that grow up inside us towards other people. And we kind of are, all the time, hoping that sometime an angel will swoop down, and pick it out, and take it away.

Loved ones, God will not deal with us like that. God respects your free will. And he will not take from you what you are not willing to let go of yourself. You have to lay down your self-will on the cross.

Here is the other principle in Philippians 4:13. And loved ones, you really ought to look at that

verse. And let me remind you of how often you say, "I cannot let go of my right to be proud. I cannot let go of my right to have my own way. I cannot let go of my right to be angry." How often we say that. Now look at that verse. And loved ones, you have a whole word of God to argue with, if you are going to hold to that.

"I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." Now dear ones, surely that's the meaning of Jesus' death: that he destroyed the power of independence that fuels our anger and our lust and our criticism and our sarcasm. He destroyed that power on the cross, so that we now have the ability to let go of it. Surely that's the meaning.

I mean, do you not think that a lot of us are struggling with anger and envy and jealousy and irritability, as if they are huge monsters that are still alive in God's world? Loved ones, the message of history is that those were destroyed on the cross in Jesus. And therefore we are now able to let go of those things.

Now, I'll agree with you a thousand times that you cannot make yourself like Jesus. I agree. We cannot make ourselves like God. Only the Holy Spirit of God can do that. So you cannot walk in continual victory in your own life unless the power of God's Holy Spirit does it. But he will only fill you if you'll let go of the other stuff that runs your life. That, you can let go of. You cannot fill yourself with the beauty of Jesus, but you can get rid of your own ugliness. Loved ones, you can. And much of the reason why we don't, is because we don't see how bad it is. And that's the job of the law, if you look back at Romans 7:13.

"Did that which is good, then bring death to me?"

"...Make me feel miserable and guilty and alone and condemned?"

"By no means! It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure."

Loved ones, we'll only let go of the thing when we see that it's absolutely antagonistic to God. And really you do let go of it then, you know.

I have a dear friend who does not come to our groups here. But I have known him almost since I came to the States. And for years, he and I have battled back and forward over his smoking problem, because he is concerned about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. And he is concerned about entering into deliverance from the old self-will. And he knew that this was part of it. He was just a heavy smoker and he was battling and battling. And we were just in -- I mean he would almost enjoy me telling it. It was so stupid, you know.

For years, he'd come to me, and we'd pray together. And he'd say, "Yeah brother, I am going to give it up." And he'd go away and have another shot at it, and it just went on, year after year after year.

My wife is his dentist. And about maybe a month ago, she was looking in the mouth and saw the old white tissue at the back of his mouth. And some of the medics know -- it was looking like the beginning of cancer. And so she sent it off to the lab. And you know, we spent quite a prayerful weekend, that weekend, because he didn't know anything about it.

And it came back clear. But you can guess the effect that that has on his own will now. Suddenly, the thing is a deadly thing. Suddenly it's no longer a preference that he would like to exercise. Suddenly it's, "Do you want to continue to live? Then you have to let go of that."

Now loved ones, do you see that the purpose of the law is to do that for each one of us in regard to that self-will, that we're exercising in regard to a thousand things? That's why the law exists, to make that sin exceedingly sinful.

That's what the law did in the Old Testament. Just before we close, will you look at Leviticus 20? So often we play around with the Ouija boards, or we want to have a little bit of fun with spiritism or séances.

Leviticus 20:6, "If a person turns to mediums and wizards, playing the harlot after them, I will set my face against that person, and will cut him off from among his people." And God just cuts them off.

Sometimes we play around with the business of a little bit of lust in our hearts, a little bit of adulterous thinking. Leviticus 20:10.

"If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall be put to death, their blood is upon them."

Leviticus 20:13. Some of us play around you know, with some other thoughts. "Maybe the thoughts aren't too bad," we say.

"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them".

Loved ones, the purpose of the law is to enable us to see that our self-will is a deadly thing and is destroying us.

Oh, you know, what the nation needs, and what the world needs, is a group of people somewhere who would stay under the searchlight of God's law long enough for everything of self-will to be laser-beamed and x-rayed out of their lives, so that the light of God could begin to shine through them to the world.

So I'd just ask you, "Would you stay under God's law? Would you stay patiently under it, knowing that it's hitting us all in the same way?" It's just as painful for all of us. But loved ones, stay under it. Don't run away from it. Don't think that somehow by getting out from under it, then things will be right. Loved ones, the guilt will just continue. The purpose of the law is to make us so sick of that deadly disease inside us that we're willing to let it go.

And I thank God for the time in my own life when it was that deadly to me. And I pray that you'll stay under it and let God's law operate in you.

I tell you, all you have to do to be delivered is stop, that's it. Just stop. That's it. Don't argue with the law. Don't try to rationalize it. Don't try to argue about whether we're under law or under grace. Just stop the thing, whatever it is, that the law is showing up inside.

"And have you a power to do it?" Of course, you have. "I can do all things through Christ that

strengthens me.”

Can't you be nice to your mom on Mother's Day? It's amazing, isn't it? When you have enough reasons for doing it, you'll do it. If the smoking is causing the cancer, you have enough reason. You'll stop doing it. The same with everything else loved ones, really. Let's pray.