

Using -- Not Abusing -- The World

Romans 8:38b

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Here is something very easy to imagine: a hard day at the office or at school. Okay, so you just couldn't grab any rest and you hit emergency after emergency --it's one of those days. You miss several appointments or assignments and you spoil your relationship with at least one significant other and you're just feeling fed up and tired and worn out. Now loved ones, many dear ones in our society, and maybe some of you, when they're faced with that come home and using the beer, or the martini, or the cigarette is the only way in which they can possibly unwind after a day like that, so that's what they do -- maybe some of you do -- and actually it works. It does work because scientifically the nicotine and the alcohol are depressant drugs.

And so through the blood stream and through their effect on the nerve endings, they actually immobilize the part of your brain that receives warning signals that there's strain in your whole personality. That's what happens; it actually cuts off the warning signals so that you don't know that all kinds of strain exist in your body as result of that kind of hectic day. And so you seem to feel relaxed and you enter into that kind of specious vacuum, or at least you're removed from it all, and it happens simply because they're depressant drugs and that's what they do.

They immobilize the part of your brain that receives those danger signals of strain from your body. So you remember the way you tensed up when he said that thing to you during the day, or you remember the way your emotions got all worked up with anxiety because you couldn't get this assignment in. Now what the depressant drugs do is they cut off those signals -- they don't eliminate the strain, the strain is still there -- they just cut off the reception of those signals to your brain. So really, in a way, you do become like the Titanic. That's really what happens when you down the beer, or the martini, or you smoke the cigarette. You actually become like the Titanic, where all the passengers went on in a kind of unrealistic euphoria because they were insulated from the knowledge that the crew or the Captain had about the dangers they were about to face. And so in effect that's what happens; you become kind of like a Titanic and you're insulated from the things that are actually beginning to burn inside.

What happens to most of us is that we get so accustomed to neutralizing the warning bells or the alarm signals that let us know there are fires raging inside our life or our body that we become incapable of facing those fires, and we become incapable of facing life without cutting off the warning signals. That's when we become addicts or junkies, because we become incapable of facing life without using something physical to cut off the "Thousand natural shocks," that Shakespeare said, "flesh is heir to" [Hamlet]. And so we cut off those thousand shocks that come in upon us; we cut off our knowledge of them by some kind of drug addiction. Now that is one way to get peace. And loved ones, Jesus pointed that out in John 14:27. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." So that is one kind of peace, you see, that the world can give.

Now it can give it, loved ones, so nobody should sit here this morning and say it doesn't work. You have to keep on and on at it and it becomes your master eventually, but it does bring you a kind of peace. It involves using the physical world to dull the body's warning signals so that you're no longer aware of the pains that come to you from living without your heavenly Father, that's it.

It's using the physical world to dull the warning signals that tell you that you're not living the way you should live and that you don't need to live a day in a terrible kind of juggernaut experience such as you do.

The warning signals come to you and give you headaches and give you anxiety and worry -- they're to warn you that you're not living the way you were meant to live -- you weren't meant to shatter through a day like that. You were meant to trust your loving Father for all that day. You were meant to look to him each moment, and he'd have taken care of the emergencies, and he'd have enabled you to get over the difficulty of the appointments that you've missed. But really, drug addiction is using the physical world to cut off those signals so that you can continue to live without God -- without treating him as your loving Father. And yet you don't have to put up with the signals in your brain that "there is something rotten in the state of Denmark", that there is something wrong inside.

Now loved ones, God's word has a title for that; it's called "abusing the world." That's what it is -- it's "abusing the world." Not using the world or the gifts or the material things in the world for the purpose for which they were given, but using them, in fact, to prevent yourself realizing that you don't trust the Creator as your loving Father.

Now I think many of us here this morning probably rose delightedly to that whole sermon last Sunday, because it was a really good "smoking and drinking" sermon. And I think many of you could have sat there and said, "That's it, brother, just give it to them -- those miserable old addicts sitting beside me here. Their bodies have got so used to the drug that they can't get away from it and yet, that has been crucified with Christ and they can stop it if they want to -- why don't they? That's right, you go for them."

And it's very easy loved ones, to do that in all of our self-righteousness and to miss the point of what God was saying to us last Sunday. To miss the point that sin is not just using something physical to achieve that purpose, but sin is using any drug, whether it be a physical drug, or emotional drug, or an intellectual drug -- it's using any of those drugs so that you can live without trusting God as your loving Father.

It's using anything as a substitute for the one relationship that you need -- and that is a loving relationship of trust as the son and daughter of the Person who made you. And sin is using any drug for that -- the alcohol and caffeine are just easy examples. But loved ones, it's using any drug -- emotional, intellectual, or physical -- to prevent you trusting the Father for the love and sympathy and understanding that you're to receive from him only.

So would you come back with me to the hard day that we talked about? And let's think this time that you come home and you've had the personality conflicts, and you've had the emergencies and you're just worn out. You wouldn't dream of touching a cigarette -- "Oh no." And you wouldn't dream of touching that martini because "Oh, that's addiction and dirty, bad, sin" and you would not have anything to do with it. But your poor roommate, or your partner, or your dearest friend, or your dog, or yourself -- you explain the day completely to them, from your point of view of course.

You explain it all, and the poor wife has to sit there, the poor husband has to listen to it all. "He said this to me and I said this to him." Or your roommate, or your friend -- whoever happens to be around -- and then after explaining it all, you sit back and you bathe as the drug rolls over you. All that confidential sympathizing comes from the other person, and that kind of marital

reinforcement comes from that poor husband or wife whose duty it is to give it to us or that self pity that comes from ourselves -- we sit back and allow it all to roll over us and soothe us, and soothe us, and soothe us. That's drug addiction.

That's receiving from someone else the love and the understanding that we are meant to receive from our God alone. I don't need to tell you that most family problems, most roommate problems come exactly from that because they don't give you what you think they should give you. That's where the resentments come up. "She doesn't understand me, doesn't love me, and has no interest in me; has interest only in herself. He doesn't care about what I'm going through at all, just has no ability to put himself in anybody else's shoes." And the same with the husbands and wives, we're not getting from them what other husbands and wives give to their partners. And we never say it, but deep, deep down all kinds of resentments and bitterness's build up inside because we're trying to receive a drug from someone else that will act as a substitute for the love and understanding and sympathy of our dear Father.

Now loved ones, a whole new life breaks upon you when you accept that that old world-dependent, people-oriented, circumstance-drugged personality was crucified with Christ, and you decide that you no longer need from people, or from circumstances, or from situations, or from experiences -- the love and the understanding and the reinforcement that you can get from your own God. A whole new life breaks upon you -- you would not believe it -- a whole new, courageous, free, healthy, outgoing, dynamic begins to take hold of you and you cease to be a poor little creature who always needs to be comforted, or encouraged, or always needs the recognition of his peers, or always needs the adulation of his friends, or the sympathy of his partner. You become instead, a person who is full, and complete, and free, and liberated, and filled with an outgoing love themselves. Now loved ones, that's what we mean when some of you committed yourselves to Jesus last Sunday. That's what it means. It means joining Jesus in a death to anything -- be it nicotine, or caffeine, or the sympathy of other people, or the love, or the adulation of other people -- anything but God's own love for you.

Now God's word puts it lots of different ways. So would you look at some verses, loved ones, just to see what it is? Galatians 4:6, "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" Now when you turn from your friends, or from other people, or from things for comfort and for consolation, and you decide, "I'm finished. I'm letting that old personality that got used to that kind of treatment be destroyed with Jesus" -- loved ones, there comes into your life a Spirit from God that makes you feel like his son, makes you feel like his daughter. That's right, really. It's a Spirit that comes inside and makes you feel like God is your Father.

You've probably heard me talk often about it on Sunday mornings and you thought, "Oh, I'd love to have that attitude to the person who made the sky above me -- I'd love to feel that in the midst of that argument with the boss, I'd love to feel that." Loved ones, you can only feel it if God sends the Spirit of his son into your heart, and he only does that if you will give up all other crutches. You can't have your friend's love, and your friend's comfort, and your friend's consolation and then grab Jesus as well. It has to be either or; it's one or the other. It's deciding, "I'll depend on one and not the other."

That's partly what it means -- it means a wholehearted experience. Now that's the way the Bible described it in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come." And it's like being a new person, it really is.

It's like being a completely different person from the one you used to be. And if you've ever lost that sense of being an absolutely new creation, be sure that it's because you've gone back to some of your old addiction, really. If there's anybody here who has lost the sense of being a new creation, it's because you've gone back to some of the old addiction. You're still looking to the poor little new car for a little bit of excitement. You've gone back to some of the old things, and you're getting a little bit of excitement or love or sympathy from those and that's why you've ceased to be a new creation, or to sense you are a new creation.

And loved ones, one last verse, Galatians 6:14, "But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." That's what it's like. It's accepting your place in Jesus and expecting no comfort but what comes from your Father, expecting no clothing but what he gives you. It's accepting that as far as your inner needs are concerned, it's as if the world did not exist, that's it.

Now you know this is totally different to we've all been taught. We've all been taught, "You ought to use the world to meet your needs." That wasn't God's plan at all. But we've got so used to it that we're like parasites -- trying to fulfill our needs from each other -- and we were never meant to. We're meant to be crucified with Christ to the world and the world crucified to us.

That's what baptism really means, you know. That's why in the New Testament they put people right underneath the water, really. I was a Methodist and we just sprinkled -- I didn't understand what you Baptists were doing! [Laughter] But I see it now; that it is going down under the water so that it's like being buried. It's as if the other world is no longer in existence. It's just the same as Noah. You remember in the days of Noah the whole world was flooded out, and Noah had only the ark to depend on.

Now that's what it's like in the entry into Jesus. It's from then on, looking to him only for all your needs. And that's what God's love in Christ is, loved ones. It's God coming and putting his arm around you saying, "Look my son, my daughter, will you join my son on the cross in dying to receiving anything but what I gave him? Will you do that too? Will you die to anyone fulfilling your need or anything fulfilling your need except me? Will you? And look -- you can feel my arm around you -- I'll be reliable, I'll be faithful. You're my son, you're my daughter, and I won't let you die. But just die to receiving anything from anybody else but what I give you, will you? And if I don't give you it, will you be content to be without it?" That's what it means, loved ones.

Now the verse that we're studying today is Romans 8:38. And I'd like to share one truth with you, from that verse: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." I'd like to point you to the word life, "For I am sure that life will not be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." The ascetic says it will. The ascetic says, "You don't need people. You don't need them to supply your needs; you don't need them to supply anything. You need to shut yourself off from human relationships; you need to shut yourself off from any possessions. You need to be as poor as you possibly can be; you need to get away from the world." That's what the ascetic says and there are many dear ascetics in the Eastern religions, in Zen Buddhism, in all kinds of sects and cults, and that's their theory. They say, "No, life can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus -- that's why you have to keep away from life. Keep away from the outside world, cut yourself off, and enter into a monastery. Keep away from human relationships,

keep away from people, and keep away from things.”

Now loved ones, I am afraid that some of you might think that dying with Jesus is the same thing. And I think that some of you at times think, “You mean I’ve to look to God alone for all the sympathy and love I need? I’ve to look to him alone for my security and my significance and my happiness? I have to die to looking to ski trips or vacations for my enjoyment. I have to die to looking to my job or my possessions for my sense of security. I have to die to looking to other people for my sense of importance and worth. Well then, what’s the point of all those things? If I don’t need them, I may as well not be in this world.”

And loved ones, do you see how selfish and brain washed we have become? Do you see what we’re saying? We’re saying, “If I don’t need my wife to give me love and sympathy, if I don’t need a skiing holiday to break a little the boredom of life and give me a little excitement, if I don’t need an odd meal out in the evenings to give me something to look forward to, then why bother with any of those things? Let me get rid of my wife; let me get rid of my car. I don’t need to go out, so I should never go out -- and then I should just stop living.”

Loved ones, do you see that you do need all those people and all those things? And do you know why you need them? To share God’s love of you and his evaluation of you. To share the sense of worth that you have received from him, to share the sense of security that you’ve received from him, to share that sense of happiness that you are receiving from your relationship with him. You need people. You can’t do without people because that love has to flow through you, otherwise it doesn’t exist. God didn’t need us to express his love to, because he had Jesus. But loved ones, we need each other, otherwise love is unreal. And so sure, you need your husbands and your wives -- we need each other, here in this room, but not to get -- to give.

Loved ones, we’re so brain washed, don’t you see? We’ve become such perverts that we think, “Ah that’s unreal, that’s unreal.” But loved ones, that’s why we’re here. And if you say to me, “But why the possessions?” For the same reason -- to share with others a love and a generosity that you’ve got from your Father. The car isn’t there for you to enjoy, the car is there for you to share that love and that generosity with others, that’s why it’s there. The food isn’t there just for you to enjoy, it’s for you to share with other people and share the generosity and love that God has given to you. It’s to enable you to be strong enough to do what God wants you to do here in the world. And so do you see when we talk about dying to all those people and things supplying what God alone should supply, we’re not saying you don’t need those things, but you don’t need them for your security, significance and happiness. You need them in order to share that sense of security, significance, and happiness that you’ve got from your Father with others.

Loved ones, it’s just a different home life, honestly it is, it’s just a different home life when you come home at the end of a hard day and you’re not worn out -- because you’ve hit each emergency with your dear Father. You know he’s there, and you’ve looked up to him at each moment. You haven’t gathered a whole lot of strains as the day has gone on, but you come home more filled with his life than you went out, because that life has been flowing through you in lots of situations and emergencies. You come home with it flowing through you, and you don’t come home to sit down and say, “Okay, just bathe my feet and wipe my troubled brow and give me my dinner.” You don’t. You

come home and you go in to help the other person and to give to the other person the limitless energy and love that the Father has been giving you all day. And loved ones what happens is -- that home or that room of yours begins to burst with love.

Now I mean that -- that's real. Don't you sit there and say, "That's just idealistic." That home of yours begins to burst with love, and the world begins to feel the overflow of that, and that's God's plan. That's what it means to be his child. That's what it means to be crucified with Jesus; so that those of us who accept our crucifixion with Christ are not miserable ascetics who will not swim, or will not ski, or will not go out in power boats, or will not buy cars or will not have homes, but we're people who do not look to those things for the security and significance and happiness that we know we can receive only from our dear, close relationship with our Father. Now loved ones, that's what you were made for.

Really, you're just dumb if you're sitting there and you think of all the incredible dangers in this world. When you think of it, you could go out and cross the road and that's it. When you think of the incredible dangers, and all of us are sitting here confident, "Oh sure, sure, no one would press the nuclear button." But we all know fine well that some mad-man sometime is going to press the button -- you know that -- somebody's going to do it sooner or later.

When you think of all the incredible dangers in this world, -- and actually they were always as great as this, we just have more abilities to face them and therefore they're greater now -- but when you think of all the incredible dangers, do you really think that you were meant to live in this world without having an omnipotent, almighty Father who loved you taking care of you -- do you? Loved ones, no dear Creator would do that to anybody, and your Creator hasn't done it to you. He loves you, and he can supply every need -- if you'll die to the substitutes that you're trying to get from everybody else and everything else -- that's it really.

So I pray that you'll take the step. It's easy -- just take it yourself. You do need to take a stand, do you see that? You do need to take a stand. I used to feel, "No, no, you can kind of sink into it by osmosis." You don't -- you take a stand. It's like a marriage; you can say, "I love you, I love you, I love you," and she'll believe you, believe you, believe you -- for a while. But there has to come a time when you both go together and you make a commitment before somebody else and say, "We're together." There's something incredible happens when that takes place -- it's like that. If you want to change from being just a creature to a child of God then you do need to take a definite step of faith and say, "Father, I see what I need to do; from now on I'm going to look to you, and each time you point out to me that I'm looking to people, I'll stop it." You can do it there, where you are sitting.

But loved ones, if you see all this, then I'd encourage you to take a step this morning, and then come to communion tonight and seal it. You'll hear different ones of us sharing here today how we have just begun this kind of life. So I'd encourage you to do it. I think we should pray, loved ones.

Father, thank you that dying with Jesus to anyone or anything supplying our needs but you is a hard experience at first, but it leads into a beautiful experience of resurrection life. And Father, thank you that we can accept by faith this morning that you have destroyed this old, addictive

personality of ours, which for years has fed off the praise of our teachers, or the adulation of our friends, or the boasting of our parents -- this personality that for years has got used to little thrills that come from a skiing holiday, or going out with somebody new.

Father, we accept that this old, addictive personality has been crucified with Christ. Lord, we believe that you destroyed it there, and that we, by faith, can be made new this morning and can live as your child, dependent on you only, and able at last to give instead of to get. Thank you Lord, thank you. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each and every one of us now and evermore. Amen.