

Sermon for Sunday, March 20, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor  
Central Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Missouri, 63105

"HOW TO BE GOOD AND ENJOY IT!"

Romans 8:1-11

"If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." --Romans 8:11

Someone has said that if anything is fun, it is either illegal, immoral or fattening. On the other hand, if someone really wants to put another person down and ridicule him, he says something like this, "Oh, he is a goodie-goodie." Or, he says, "He is so pious." And the implication of all of this is that being good is no fun. As a matter of fact, some of the modern schools of psychiatry have worked on this principle. For example, Freud developed the term "id" to describe the primitive, instinctive element of the human being. According to Freud, the "id" is blind to anything except the need for its own satisfaction, its own protection, and the promotion of its own instinctive needs. The "id" is not concerned about the interests and needs of other people or even of reality. It is completely and unashamedly selfish. However, the "id" soon learns that its needs cannot be satisfied without dealing realistically with the world around it. To have needs met, cooperation with other factors must be developed. As a result, the child soon learns to accommodate itself to its external world. As the child records and stores in memory the various experiences, the painful and the good, that it has in relationship to its environment, the child begins to develop a second psychic mechanism which Freud called the "ego". Gradually the ego assumes control of the child's attitudes and behavior which had previously been totally under the control of the id. Yet, just underneath the surface and waiting to seize control, is the id.

But consider this question: suppose the primitive and instinctive needs of the id are so strong and powerful and at the same time come into conflict with the ego. For example, suppose a person has a tremendous sex drive but the ego has learned from its environment that expressing this sex drive is unacceptable. How does the person handle that drive? And how does a person handle the inner conflict between what a person wants to do and what society will permit? Or, again, suppose the id has a desperate need for love and reassurance, but the environment around a person does not give that kind of love and support. What does a person do to get the love he so desperately needs? How does he handle the inner conflict between his id and his ego.

Well, according to the Freudian approach, what needs to be done is to knock down or destroy or remove the barriers between the id and the satisfaction of its wants and needs. If you do that, you see, you remove the conflict and the inner turmoil and tension that a person is experiencing. For example, if a person has a strong, unmet sex drive which cannot be fulfilled because of the standards of its surrounding environment, one has only to remove the internal barriers of the ego so that the barriers no longer exist. Therefore, if a person can be convinced that it is alright to express his sex needs, that the standards of society are repressing him, that the morals of the world are not truly significant or are wrong and against his best interests, then the conflict is removed. He is free to do as he pleases.

But let me raise this question: does that not reduce us to a mere animal? Does it not remove us to the level of a mere animal who is responding blindly, instinctively, to its own needs without reference to the interests and needs of other people? Is that not totally and completely selfish? Is it not immediately apparent that the Christian cannot accept that view of man? Can we really accept the fact that our lives are controlled by beastly instincts and basic, primitive urges?

All of us have this sort of conflict going on in our lives. St. Paul experienced it, too. He once cried out in anguish, "...I know that nothing good dwells within me, that, is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:18,19). So the question for the Christian is this: how can I handle my inner man, my id? How can I control my primitive needs and drives so that they do not control me? Is there some way to conform to the standards of God and not have inner turmoil? Is there any way to be good and enjoy it?

The first step in handling our inner man is to let God's Spirit into our instincts, into our primitive drives, into our inmost being. There are those who tell us that our inner being is neither good nor bad, it is simply "natural". But the Christian is one who knows that what is natural or instinctive is a consequence of man's fallenness, a result of his brokenness with God. Like St. Paul, we see in our members a war going on between what we are and what God meant for us to be. We are captive, as St. Paul puts it, to the law of sin which dwells in our members. Like him we cry out, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:21ff).

Do you like the things your inner man--or your id--makes you do? Are you pleased with the sort of passions you have--the desires you have--the needs you have--the things you often want to do? Do you like it when your inner being strikes out in jealousy, or anger, or resentment? Are you pleased when you have wants and wishes that seem to control your life when you know they are really wrong, when you know they are not what God wants for you?

Over in the second chapter of I Corinthians, St. Paul talks about that natural man. He says that the natural man does not receive the gifts of God. (I Cor. 2:14). No, the Christian cannot accept his natural man, his inner being, his id, as normal. He knows that what is in him is broken, fallen, sinful. Therefore, to be what God wants him to be, in order to be God's man, he must begin by letting God's Spirit into his life to deal with the core of his being, his inner man.

Now, you are never going to be much different from what you are this morning until you do that. You see, my ego will not admit much of my inner being, my instinctive urges, to my conscious mind. My ego has learned that certain thoughts, certain acts, certain patterns of behavior are not acceptable. Therefore, when my inner being seeks to express itself, the ego acts as a policeman and represses--it keeps it from my conscious mind. And part of my problem with myself is that I don't even know or always understand my inner being. If I want to pray about my inner being, often I don't even know how to pray. Often I don't know why I may be feeling as I do, why I have the drives and desires and needs that I do. My conscious mind will not let these things into it. So I am not going to be much different from what I am until God gets into my inner being, my inner man, my natural being, and does something redemptive.

Isn't that true in your life? Most of us who are Christians have with our conscious minds accepted Christ. We have sought to surrender our hearts and minds to Christ. Yet, it is true for all of us that we still have instincts, passions, evil desires, that sometimes flood our hearts and minds and we seem to have no control over them. We are convinced with our rational minds about all the things of God, yet somehow our inner being is not converted to them. I think that is some of the agony of St. Paul when he cried out, "who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

With your mind perhaps you believe in God, you have accepted Jesus, you are convinced of the things of the Lord. But have you truly been converted to him in your inner being--is your inner man transformed, renewed, redeemed? Have you let God's Spirit penetrate into the depths of your heart, have you surrendered to him your instinctive desires, your primitive urges? How about your frustrated needs, your thwarted wants, your unmet needs for love that have been repressed and pushed down in the inner man, but which still cause you inner agony and hurt and pain? Have you let God into that?

Would you like to know how to let God into your inner being, your inner man? Let me tell you what the Bible says. Here is step one: first, you must sincerely desire and earnestly want God's Spirit to control your life. You must honestly and truly be willing to surrender your inner being to Jesus. The Bible says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). If you are tired of the inner conflicts in your life, of being controlled by a part of you that you sometimes don't even understand, if you are hungering and thirsting for a new life, that is the first requirement. As Jesus once said, "If anyone thirst, let him come to me" (St. John 7:37).

Here is step two: deal with all of your past sins by confessing them and asking God to forgive you. When you do that, the Bible makes some incredible promises. In Colossians we read, "And you who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:13,14). Isn't that an incredible promise? Yes, "nailing our sins to the cross." And over in I John we read, "if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins...(and) for the sins of the whole world" (2:1,2).

I am reading a book about one of the great religious leaders of the world today, a man named David DuPlessis, and in it he tells of a vision he had when he confessed his sins. He writes, "A book appeared in my mind. I looked closely, and it became clearer. There was a book and two hands. One hand held the book; the other paged through it. I strained to be attentive, expecting to see something I could read, but the pages were blank, blistering, pure white. The last page was turned and then I heard inside myself, 'there is nothing recorded against you. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has cleansed you from all unrighteousness.'" Then David adds, "I fully realized then that everything...was wiped out by the blood of Jesus. Pure, absolute joy filled my soul, my very being" (page 33,34).

Here is step three: ask God to fill you. The Bible says, "Ask and you shall receive..." The Bible says, "You have not because you ask not." And Jesus promises us, "For every one who asks receives..." (St. Matt. 7:8).

And here is step four: by faith believe that you are filled with God's Spirit. Did you know that you could dare to make such a faith-claim? You can. Here's why: first, God commands us to be filled and we know that is his will. In Ephesians 5:18 he tells us, "...be filled with the Spirit." That is his command and if he commands it we know it is his will. Second, if we ask anything according to his will, we know he hears us and answers us. The Bible says, "And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (I John 5:14). So if it is God's will that we be filled with His Spirit, and if we ask anything that is in his will, we receive it.

How about your inner man, your id, your inner being? It needs redeeming, trans- forming; it needs to be made whole. You see, you can't do it alone--not by yourself. But when we let God into our inner being the Bible says, "...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words..." (Romans 8:26). And that is the first step in being good and enjoying it.

There may be some here who earnestly desire to have God's Spirit in their inner being. If you are one of those, I am going to pray a little prayer and you repeat it silently after me.

Dear God, I know my inner man is sinful. I confess my sin. Forgive me, for Jesus' sake, who nailed my sins to the cross, and fill me, Lord, with your Spirit. I ask it because I need it. I ask it because it is in your will that I be filled. I am believing that I am filled because I believe your word. Thank you for forgiving me, thank you for filling me. Thank you for the work you have begun just now to redeem me in my inner man.

Amen.

I am reading a book about one of the great religious leaders of the world today, a man named David Ben-Gurion, and in it he tells of a vision he had when he was a child. He said, "A book appeared in my hand. I looked closely, and it became clear. There was a book and two hands. One hand held the book; the other held a quill. I reached to be attentive, expecting to see something I could read, but the pages were blank, blurring, puts white. The last page was turned and then I heard inside myself, 'There is nothing recorded against you. The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has cleansed you from all unrighteousness.'" Then David adds, "I fully realized then that everything... was wiped out by the blood of Jesus. Pure, absolute joy filled my soul, my very being" (page 33).

Here is step three: ask God to fill you. The Bible says, "Ask and you shall receive..." The Bible says, "You have not because you ask not." And Jesus promises us, "For every one who asks receives..." (St. Matt. 7:8).

And here is step four: by faith believe that you are filled with God's Spirit. Did you know that you could dare to make such a faith-claim? You can. Here's what first, God commands us to be filled and we know that is His will. In Ephesians 5:18 He tells us, "...be filled with the Spirit." That is His command and it is His will. We know His will. Second, He we ask anything according to His will, we know He hears us and answers us. The Bible says, "Whatever is the command which we have heard, that He will do it for us according to His will." (I John 3:22). So He will do it for us. Third, we believe that He will do it for us and He will receive it.