

Barratt Ministries Challenge

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The Two Natures - Holiness Part 1

by Maurice Barratt

There are multitudes of Christians who genuinely want to live for God, but are constantly frustrated because they know they don't come up to the standard they read in the Bible; and even if they can control their outward behaviour, they know that their secret lives are not what they should be - all because they have not understood a simple truth.

In his first letter, John makes two statements that seem to contradict each other. First of all, he makes it clear that Christians still sin after they are saved, "If we say we have no sin", he wrote to his Christian congregation, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). That is a clear enough statement. You don't stop sinning when you become a Christian. Paul adds his own personal testimony to John's words: "The good that I want to do, I don't do", he confessed, "but the evil that I don't want to do, I do" (Romans 7:19). Even if we stop committing gross, outward sins when we become Christians, sin is still in our inward nature - the old nature. We may not steal or commit adultery or murder - but inwardly, in our hearts, anger, covetousness and wrong desires still fester. And Jesus told us plainly that anger against our brother is the seed of murder, and a lustful look at another man's wife is adultery in the heart. Paul lists the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19. It is a formidable list: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, murders ... But these are the unchanging characteristics of the old nature. Even if we commit none of them outwardly, they are still in our hearts! We all inherit that old nature. To understand why, we need to look back to Adam.

The Two Trees

In the beginning, God gave Adam free will. But God didn't give him a conscience. He didn't want Adam to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. That means God didn't want Adam to know good or evil. The only choice He gave Adam was to obey or disobey. God didn't want him to make moral choices based on his conscience, choices based on a knowledge of what is good and what is evil. It is very important for us to realise this. Adam was meant to be free of conscience, untroubled by moral questions and decisions. But Adam ate from the tree, and from that moment he had a moral conscience; and that is why every decision that each one of us makes today is influenced by our knowledge of good and evil, by our conscience.

We inherited all of Adam's character and nature - we are born sinners. No child is born innocent and pure. Some people dispute that, but it's easy to prove. Do you need to teach a child how to be naughty? Are children naturally good, obedient and unselfish? Of course not! Almost the first word a child learns is "No!" Parents have to teach their child how to be good, not how to be naughty! Look at it another way. Can two sinners produce a saint? If the parents are sinful by nature, then they are

not going to produce a holy child who is good by nature! They'll produce a child with the same nature as they have. Sinners produce sinners. There's no alternative. For that reason, there is a sense in which I don't feel bad that I am a sinner. It's not my fault! I was born that way. I had no choice in the matter, so it can't be my fault. It's Adam who is to blame. And in fact that is why Jesus died, because of one man's transgression. "By one man sin entered the world" (Romans 5:12). We sin because Adam sinned first.

So scripture and experience tell us the same thing - we are still sinners even though we are Christians. The old nature, completely corrupt and selfish, is still with us. And God still sees our sins. He isn't blind! He sees us exactly as we are, guilty - but this is the miracle of grace. He forgave us, He had mercy on us. Every Christian has received that forgiveness, and from now on we do not need mercy any longer, even when we sin. That may surprise you, but it's what John says. Right after he tells us that we are deceiving ourselves if we say we are not sinners, John adds, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins". God does not need to be merciful to us any longer. He showed one great act of mercy once and for all in Christ's death, and now He only has to be faithful to His promise of forgiveness, and just to remember that Christ's death was once and for all - for past, present and future sins. This all means that I am not accountable for my sins. I am a forgiven sinner. That is grace, and that is true freedom!

The Condition

There is only one condition: "If we confess". We have to admit that we are sinners. That is vital. For if we begin to say we are not sinners any more, we walk out of grace. We cut ourselves off from God's forgiveness, because we have started to believe in our own righteousness. That's self-righteousness, the sin of the Pharisees. Even Jesus could not help them. He spent half His ministry trying to expose the Pharisees, saying to them, "You're wonderful on the outside, you do everything right; you pray, you fast, you obey every commandment - but inside you're filthy, unclean - you're of your father, the devil!" Self-righteousness takes you right out of the family of God, and puts you in the family of the devil!

Now let's return to 1 John and look at a statement that seems to be a direct contradiction to the first one. "Whoever is born of God does not commit sin: he cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John 3:9). So, if we say we have no sin as Christians, John says we deceive ourselves and make God a liar; but then he says that if we are born of God we cannot sin! How do we resolve this? There must be an answer. We mustn't make the mistake of presuming that they can't both be true, and coming down in favour of one side or the other. Truth always has two sides, like a coin. John wasn't trying to confuse the church. In fact, John took it for granted that his readers would understand the simple truth which resolves the contradiction: that we have two natures. A Christian is a person with two completely different and distinct characters - an old nature and a new nature.

The New Nature

If the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19) are the characteristics of the old nature, the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) perfectly describes the new nature. The new nature is the character of Christ

Himself! You received this new nature when you were born again - indeed, that's what being "born again" means. A new life begins inside you, which is the new nature, which is the character of Christ. Christ cannot sin! That is why John says "Whoever is born of God ... cannot sin". So if we have this new nature inside of us, why is it that we do not seem to naturally manifest the fruit of the Spirit - why don't we have the character of Christ? There is a simple reason. It's because we spend our time trying to control the old nature instead of feeding the new nature.

Non-believers spend their whole lives trying to control their old nature. Whether they want to be moral and respectable or not, they all have to control it in some measure. For example, one man would love to seduce every beautiful woman he meets - but he controls himself, in order to preserve his respectability, and so he just has his wife and one mistress. He puts a limit on his old nature. Another man can't wait for Friday night because he can get drunk again. He'd love to get drunk every night, but then he'd lose his job and wouldn't be able to run his nice car, so he controls himself until the weekend. Someone else has a temper, but he knows that if he really blew up he might do someone some damage, so because he's scared of ending up in prison he controls himself, even though he's boiling with rage, and just kicks the door or yells at his wife instead. That's how the world has to live.

But what about us as Christians? We have an alternative, a new nature, a completely different character. Sadly, however, many Christians are playing the same game as the world - trying to control their old nature, trying to be good and moral and respectable, trying to be good Christians! Someone in the church annoys us, so what do we do? We control our annoyance, because we know it's not Christian to get angry. But that will not make you a good Christian, it will just make you a respectable hypocrite!

It may surprise you, but God doesn't want you to learn how to control your anger or your sinful desires. He doesn't want to give you patience and a strong will to control yourself; He wants to deal with the roots so that you don't even feel angry or covetous. He wants to change your desires.

I've experienced this from both sides. For twenty years, I felt like a second-class Christian, because I was always trying to control my old nature. Nobody ever told me that my old nature was hopelessly corrupt, unchangeable, and that all I had to do was start feeding the new nature. So I always felt condemned, because I knew what I was like inside: I knew my mind was full of wrong thoughts, desires and ambitions. I was brought up as a Christian, and preachers would come to our church and talk about how we needed to be holy, and all the congregation would say "Amen!" So I presumed that I was the only one with the problems, and I daren't talk to anyone else about them. Sometimes I wondered whether I was a Christian at all; but when I considered it I knew that God was in my life. I couldn't deny it. But neither could I deny that I had problems. It seemed that my only alternative was to try and control myself, and to not let anyone know what I was like inside.

But since I discovered about the two natures my whole life has changed. I've never been so free as I am today. I can accept myself as I am, and what people think of me doesn't trouble me at all. I am what I am; I have no need to hide and be a hypocrite. If people tell me my faults, I tell them they don't know the half! I've realised the truth: I have an old nature which is completely corrupt and unredeemable. It's a corrupt tree; it can't bring forth anything except bad fruit! But I am completely unaccountable for it! That's why Christ died - He didn't die to patch up my old nature, but to forgive

me everything of the old, and to give me a new nature. And if the old nature is a bad tree that cannot bear good fruit, the new nature is a good tree that cannot bear bad fruit!

So now I've stopped trying to control my old nature. I'm not trying to be a good Christian any more! I'm not praying that God will give me a strong will to control myself. That's not the way. If that was the way, the people with the strongest will would be the holiest Christians. But it's the people who have the most of Christ in them that are the holiest - the ones who have fed their new nature. This is the secret of growth in the Christian life - feeding the new nature. If I want to grow, there is only one way to do it - I have to eat. Food produces growth. In order for my three-year-old son to grow, it is not necessary for me to give him a pep talk every day about the importance of growth. All I need to do is feed him, and he'll grow automatically. And it's the same with us. It all depends which nature we feed. If we feed the new nature and starve the old, we'll get more of Christ in us.

The problem is that we are conditioned, from living in the world, to feeding the old and starving the new! So we have to start thinking a new way. We have to renew our minds. Holiness doesn't come from strong will. It comes from a change of attitude, from starting to do the things that will build Christ in me. It's not me that lives the Christian life. Only Christ can live the Christian life. If I get more of Jesus, then He lives His life through me. Holiness is a person - Jesus Christ. "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). All we have to do is crucify that old nature, and feed the new nature. The Bible also calls it "walking in the Spirit". "Walk in the Spirit", Paul says, "and you shall not fulfil the lusts of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). You can't walk in both natures at once. One or the other will be manifest in your life. So if you're walking in the Spirit, feeding your new nature, you won't have to try and resist the lusts of the flesh - you won't even want to do them, you won't even be thinking about them. You won't have any moral and ethical dilemmas or problems of conscience - you just obey Christ and let Him live His life in you.

Recognising that we have two natures is the secret of freedom from condemnation, and feeding the new nature is the secret of how to begin to change and live the way God intended us to live.

Experiences from Life

by Joanna Barratt

Ouch! ... Truth Often Hurts

It had been just a normal day. We'd opened the church up for yet another coffee morning, and seen a few of the regulars drift into the church for coffee and to review the last Sunday's service which we had videoed and shown on the television. We'd chatted to one or two people, but nothing special had happened. I closed the doors of the church and then Maurice and I settled down to our usual practice of having a prayer for the people who had come in. We would then open Oswald J. Smith's book "Compassion For Lost Souls" which Maurice and I had been reading through each day in the hope that God would give us the compassion that we so badly needed for our district. Although it was a very good book, it rarely made any impression on me, probably because I was so self-centred

that I couldn't identify with compassion for other people and their situations. But this day God spoke loud and clear.

The Power Of Fasting

In the chapter which we were reading, Oswald J. Smith was talking about a man who lived in Africa. The village witch-doctor had just died and his position was now vacant. This particular man badly wanted to fulfil the role of witch doctor, so he went into the heart of the jungle and fasted for seven whole days - at the end of which he was totally possessed by evil spirits and could do all sorts of magic, which now qualified him for the position that he so longed for. We had just undergone some very detailed teaching on the Sermon on the Mount so I was fully aware that fasting was supposed to be part of the everyday life of a Christian - knowing all about it is one thing, but putting it into practice is quite another! It was then that I felt the sword of the Spirit pierce my heart and it made me look at my life afresh. This African man had given seven days of his life in total abstinence to be possessed of evil spirits and yet I had never even given God one day. OK, I'd given up a meal here and there, but I had never allowed myself to be put at God's disposal. I always did only what I could handle myself. And now God was challenging me to give Him a whole week to fast on water and pray so that He could possess me and use me. And because I knew without a shadow of a doubt that God was telling me to do this, I was really frightened.

Fulfilling My Obligation

I didn't tell Maurice what I had decided to do, but I began to put my plan of action into operation. I knew that it was useless for me to stay at home, where the biscuit barrel and the bread bin would beckon so readily and where I would feel powerless to refuse. I had to get away completely alone, where I was deprived of all temptation, to enable me to fulfil the obligation which I now owed to God. Whilst reading through "Redemption Tidings" magazine I came across an advertisement which offered a cottage in Matlock, Derbyshire, for the week of the Assemblies of God conference. Obviously the owners had wanted to go to the

conference and yet didn't want their home to be left vacant, so they were offering it for rental. I made contact with the owners and found out that they were the wardens of the Eventide home, which was on the same road as their house only five doors away, and that their church was just round the corner, where they were sure I'd be made very welcome.

Shut In With God

On the day appointed I arrived in Matlock armed with my Bible, hymnal and the prophecy book which I'd kept ever since God had started to speak to me personally. I was shown round the house by the people who were standing in for the wardens of the Home. Although I didn't have a television in my own home, I was very relieved to find that there was one here, because I knew that on the nights when I would be feeling very lonely I would be able to turn it on and have company. But just

before my guides left, they informed me that I wouldn't be able to use the television, as something had been removed from it due to the fact that the licence fee had not been paid! As soon as I was alone I made a much more detailed inspection of the house to see what facilities there were for me - and found that there was no radio, no cassette player, and the telephone had a lock on which enabled calls to come in but none to go out - and nobody knew I was there except Maurice, who would be collecting me again in a week's time!

I suddenly felt very frightened and vulnerable. I was totally alone. God had asked me to spend a week with him but I realised I didn't even know Him. I had served Him for years in the church and had met regularly with other Christians for spiritual activities, but this was different. I reckoned it would be best if I could work out a schedule for the week, so I decided to spend two hours in prayer and Bible reading in the morning, two hours in the afternoon and two hours in the evening. My spirit was very willing, but my flesh was incredibly weak - and I hadn't taken into account the violent headaches that began to attack me. Being a very healthy and strong-minded person normally, I was totally unprepared for the weakness that would come over my body as soon as I stopped eating, and this weakness seemed to affect everything that I did. As the week progressed I found that reading the Bible became impossible; the words would all jumble together and become a blur; my vision just couldn't take in and focus what I was looking at, my mind began to wander and I just couldn't concentrate for long periods to pray.

An Unexpected Request

On the Wednesday evening the stand in deputy at the Eventide Home called round to see me to ask if I would like to give a word to the ladies the following morning. She knew that I had come away for this week as a retreat and thought that maybe I could give some sort of testimony which would encourage the ladies. I was amazed, because my immediate response just came out of my mouth before I could catch the words - and I accepted her invitation. For about ten minutes after she had gone the Lord just cleared my mind and I was able to write down the outline for a thirty minute sermon which I could preach to the ladies the next day - but then my mind became a blur again and concentration was absolutely impossible! That night was the worst night of the whole week that I was in the house because I experienced a stomach cramp (which I had only ever read about in fasting books). It was a horrifying and fearful experience, during which I thought that I would die - but God pulled me through.

The next morning after only four hours sleep (yet again!) I wearily made my way down the road to the Home, wondering how on earth I was going to face these women with my mind so confused and blurred. I rang the bell - and as soon as I was admitted my mind miraculously cleared and strength surged through my body, so much so that I was able to sing and play the piano for the ladies with gusto and preach a twenty minute sermon, at the end of which the women were in tears asking God to help with their own prayer lives! I felt alert and bright eyed as I chatted with the deputy warden after the meeting, and almost ran back to the house to get down to my own personal prayer and Bible reading. I thought the Lord had taken me out of that first stage of fasting and cleared my mind completely so I could be spiritually alert and sharp. But as soon as I put the key into the door and

stepped inside the house this miraculous strength just flowed from me and I was totally exhausted! I picked up my Bible and prayed and put all the effort in that I could muster, but it just seemed like a waste because I couldn't remember anything that I read or anything that I said. When God called me to give Him this week I truly and sincerely felt that I would have broken through into the spiritual realm and seen God in a fresh way, but as far as I was concerned it had been a failure. My physical weakness from lack of food was only proving to emphasise the stark reality of my true spiritual state with God - I was totally impoverished!

Pride Creeps In

And yet, for all this feeling of inadequacy, the first meal that I was to partake of filled me with a great sense of satisfaction - after all, I had just completed, for the first time in my life, seven whole days on water. The food strengthened my body like magic and I immediately felt strong both physically and spiritually. I remembered the reading that Maurice and I had just had concerning the man who wanted to be a witch-doctor, and my heart filled with aspirations for what God could now do through me after giving Him a week of my life in the same manner. I could imagine myself healing the sick and casting out devils and doing all the things that He commanded His apostles to do, and I couldn't wait to get back to the church to see what God was going to do in my life! Looking back I'm amazed how quickly pride overtook my feeling of failure, but God was good and didn't allow me to stay in that situation for long.

The week after the fast I was still riding high on my spiritual cloud, and left myself very vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. During my Christian walk I'd had about four besetting sins, which I pleaded for God to deliver me from, and in His mercy He had come to my rescue, but the very first week following the fast Satan tested me again with these four things - and I fell for each one of them! I was absolutely bewildered - surely after the fast I should be more spiritual rather than more carnal! The tremendous guilt I felt drove me to prayer, and God spoke to me.

1. God reminded me that my fast was not a voluntary sacrifice, but the result of His specific instruction to me. He told me that if I had refused to do the fast, that would have made me disobedient, in which case I should have deserved punishment. The fact that I had been obedient didn't mean that I was due for a reward - it meant that I was simply fulfilling my obligation to God, whom I had claimed was my Lord and Master.
2. God told me that fasting should never be with the motive of trying to force Him to do anything - in actual fact it was meant to be a humbling process practised by Christians where they could take their minds from themselves for a period of time to concentrate on Him and His will.
3. God finally drove it home to me that I was me - Joanna Barratt - flesh and blood, and my own human nature would always desire to fulfil the lusts of the flesh. He showed me that my only chance for overcoming myself would be to feed the new nature which He gave to me when I became a Christian and to walk in the spirit.

A Humbling Experience

As I look back I'm amazed at the way I thought about myself as a Christian. Before this fast I thought that I had grown, I thought that I had changed, but God showed me that this was not so. If He had taken His hand from me at any moment I would have immediately reverted to type. The only reason for my change was the fact that I was putting spiritual laws into operation and practising what the Bible told me to do, which gave God the opportunity to alter my thinking and actions. I'm ashamed to say it, but I had accredited all these changes to my own spirituality, and without realising it had become selfrighteous. What I had expected would be a "spiritual high" turned out to be a very humbling experience, but I have since learned to thank God for these apparent times of failure, as in actual fact they are all blessings in disguise ... At least I know the truth! And the Bible says that the truth, even about myself, will set me free.