

Barratt Ministries Challenge

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IT'S ALL IN THE MIND - Holiness Part 2

by Maurice Barratt

One of the most encouraging things about the Christian life is that it's not to do with having a strong will. Change is essential; we all have to change. We need to stop living in the old nature and start living in the new nature. But how? Those of you who are weak-willed will be very relieved to know - and those of you who are strong-willed may be disappointed! - that will-power will not make you a better Christian. Why? The answer lies in the fact that God always deals with the roots. In order to get better fruit, God does not deal with the fruit. He deals with the root. I want better apples from my apple tree next year, it's no use me treating the apples with special foods or polishing them. I have to go to the compost heap and throw a load of rotting vegetables and manure on the roots. I don't have to even think about the fruit; all I need to know is where the roots are.

The Root Of The Matter

The root of you is not your will. It is your mind. This is easy to prove. You make a decision first in your mind. You think to yourself, "I'll do this". Then you apply your will. If you're strong-willed, you'll succeed, and if you're weak-willed you'll fail. But the will is a secondary thing - the thought comes first.

There are some common misunderstandings about the mind.

1. Your mind and your brain are not the same. Your brain is physical, but your mind is spiritual. The brain is really just a computer. The brain doesn't think. It just processes information, makes calculations and sends instructions to the body. But your mind is part of your spirit, and it is your mind that does the thinking. That is why it is your mind which is the centre or the root of you.
2. The Bible also talks a great deal about the heart as the centre of us. We are all familiar with this idea; we talk about "getting to the heart of the matter". What is not so apparent is that your heart, in Bible terms, is part of your mind. If you study the scriptures you will see how the mind (thoughts) and the heart are so closely related. I'll just give you two examples: "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is" (Proverbs 23:7). "The word of God ... is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12).

Discerning Our Motives

This scripture from Hebrews is very revealing. It is the mind that is the root, so it is the mind we have to deal with in order to produce better fruit. ("Fruit", don't forget, does not mean how many souls you've won, or anything like that. "Fruit" is simply the character and nature of Christ being

reproduced in your life.) We have a problem when we try to deal with our minds. We know what we're thinking - but do we know why we're thinking it - our motives?

Let me illustrate. Someone may give me a compliment, and tell me, "You're a humble man, Maurice." I may reply, "No, no, I'm not." And that may be quite true! But I could have a wrong motive for replying that way - I could be fishing for another compliment, so that they will tell me, "Oh yes you are - you're very humble." And then, I'd really feel proud! But how can I know my motives? It's very difficult - in fact, it's impossible. We cannot sort out our own motives. Scripture tells us exactly the same: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) The answer is - only God can know it. "I the LORD search the heart" (Jeremiah 17:10).

This is what Hebrews says: "The Word of God ... discerns between the thoughts and intents of the heart". Your thoughts are what you think; your intents are why you think it - your motives. In Romans, Paul reveals more about the process of changing the mind (Romans 12:1-2). But before dealing with the mind, he first mentions the body. Before we can deal with inward things - the mind and the spirit - we have to be able to rule our bodies - the outward.

Reasonable Service

So Paul begins by saying "I beseech you" - I beg you - "to present your bodies a living sacrifice". That sounds like strong stuff! But Paul says it's only "your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). It's nothing tremendous, no big deal, to conform outwardly to Christianity. Why?

Firstly, because hypocrites can do that. The Pharisees kept the outward "letter of the law" perfectly. They devoted hours to prayer. They subdued their bodies with regular fasting. They tithed their income meticulously. They made sure they conducted themselves righteously in every area of their lives and lived differently from the world around them. But they were hypocrites, because inwardly the motives of their hearts were all wrong. They were covetous, proud, and self-righteous. They had forgotten about mercy and judgement and faith (Matthew 23:23). So, if the Pharisees could have the outward righteousness, it's only reasonable for us to also have it. After all, Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the Kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20)!

Secondly, the world expect us to be righteous outwardly. They know what Christians are supposed to do. They expect us practise what we preach. If you take advantage of the office photocopier for your own work, they'll say "Hey, that's stealing! I thought you were a Christian!" If you stop work ten minutes early for lunch, or if you criticize your boss behind his back, they'll pull you up about it, because they expect Christians to have different standards. They may not be able to tell what you're like inwardly, but they do expect you to be righteous outwardly.

So having made that point clear, Paul moves on to the heart of the matter. "Do not be conformed to this world" ("Don't let the world squeeze you into its mould" is J.B. Phillips' translation) "...but be transformed by the renewing of your mind". There's the mind. This is about inward reality, inward righteousness - what the Scribes and Pharisees didn't have.

Transformation

This is an amazing fact - you can be inwardly transformed into the image and character of Christ by the renewing of your mind. If you change the way you think, you can become holy. You began your Christian life by changing your thinking. Did you realise that? "Repentance" simply means changing your mind. It is always our thinking that changes us. Remember the scripture from Proverbs: "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is". The devil also knows this, and that is why he always works on the mind, on our thinking. The mind is the centre of everything.

What We Think, We Become

Doctors understand that what we eat, we become. The nutrients in our food pass into our bloodstream and body cells and become a part of us. But what is true physically (outwardly) is also true spiritually (inwardly). What we think, we become spiritually. It's not that we become what we say, neither do we become what we believe. We become what is in our hearts - our thoughts and intents and motives. "You become what you speak" is a slogan of the "positive confession" movement. But conforming yourself to your words is actually only a form of brainwashing, and there is a big difference between re-programming your brain and renewing your mind. Genuine change only comes from a new way of thinking - a change of attitudes.

This series of messages on holiness is a preparation for looking at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount - the beatitudes. In the beatitudes, Jesus tells us what this new way of thinking is. If you read the rest of Romans 12, you will find at least thirty practical applications of the principles stated in the first two verses, all based on the Sermon on the Mount, all related to our way of thinking.

But for the moment, this message is looking at the principles rather than the practical application. The Sermon on the Mount is the practical application, and we will be going into all the details as we study the Sermon on the Mount.

So our principle is: Change only comes with a change of mind, a change of thinking. So often we wish our circumstances would change. But God wants to change our thinking, not our circumstances. If we change our thinking, we probably won't need to change our circumstances any longer, because we've dealt with the root of the problem! "If you can't change your circumstances, change your attitude" is a great maxim.

Jesus Our Example

Let's look at an example. In Philippians 2:5-8, Paul tells us that we should model the way we think on the way Christ thought. I suppose it is obvious that if we want to know how to think, we should ask how our Master thought. Paul tells us exactly: "He humbled Himself ... He made Himself of no reputation". Notice - this is important - that this doesn't mean He allowed God to humble Him. That would be passive, allowing circumstances to happen. But Jesus made an active, conscious decision. And when He had humbled Himself to become a man, He humbled Himself again: He

“became obedient to death, even the death of the cross”. He made all those decisions Himself. Jesus said, “No-one takes My life away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself” (John 10:18). Jesus made these decisions because of His way of thinking - and it’s a radical way of thinking! And it was because He thought this way and made these choices, that God loved Him and exalted Him. “Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life” (Jn 10:17). “Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9).

So “let this mind in you that was in Christ Jesus”. It’s time to change your mind!

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

Me - A Bigot?

Me - a bigot? What an insinuation! I didn’t even fully understand what the word bigot meant. And yet how easy it is to live in our own private world, full of bias, shaking off other people’s opinions with the inward thought “they don’t understand” . Often people who work for somebody very famous or wealthy can be more proud and pompous than the person that they are serving.

I don’t suppose there’s anything worse for the ego than reflected glory. Human nature has a very funny side to it, doesn’t it? It’s amazing just how many of these characteristics are at work within each one of us. The minister at my church had at one time been quite a famous man. A Granada Television film producer once stumbled across him, and at Granada’s own expense, made an hour-long documentary of the church’s activities, which was shown to 10 million people at peak viewing time on the television. The film won an Edinburgh Festival award and was shown in Italy at the World Film Festival. The story of my church, Sharon, was then told in 37 national newspapers around the world. It’s not hard to feel one of the elite when God calls you to work for a man like this - in fact, I found that I slipped quite naturally into the position.

One Of The Elite

For some years Maurice and I travelled around with our minister before his retirement to conduct various divine healing crusades in Great Britain and a number of other countries. Maurice would arrange and conduct the meetings, I would sing the solos and provide the music for the worship part, and the minister would preach the Word and pray for the sick. We worked very closely together, being of one mind and of one spirit. All day long we would be preparing for the evening service, the minister would go into a room and pray on his own and Maurice and I would do likewise combining our prayer with fasting on liquids only and we would not eat until after the meeting had finished in the evening. We felt so much a part of the crusade that we put in as much effort as possible in the hope that God would work through us. So, it was no wonder that we felt very righteous - after all, we were doing our part.

The Dregs Of Society

I remember one particular 10 day crusade which we conducted in Birkenhead. The church was located in a working class area where most of the congregation were unemployed. In order to motivate the people of the church, Maurice and I invited them to come along to the church each afternoon to pray and fast for the meetings, and a few of those who were on the dole with time to kill responded. I remember looking around at them at our first prayer session and thinking what a motley crew they were! I didn't know where they were coming from, having had no communication with them before, and to me they just looked like the failures and dregs of society who couldn't get work. To break the ice I asked them to share their testimonies with Maurice and I as we didn't know anything about them. One by one they testified, and as each one spoke God dealt very severely with my pride.

The first man to share with us made reference to the blue lines on his face. I'd noticed them already, but had just imagined they were blue veins showing beneath the skin. But then he told his story of how a number of years ago he'd had a motor bike accident and had found himself wrapped around a lamp-post. He was rushed to hospital and was so severely damaged that they actually needed to wire his skull together and what I was seeing and thinking were blue veins was actually this wire showing beneath his skin. The accident had left him totally paralysed, confined to a wheel chair for a number of years. His brain had worked perfectly but his body just couldn't co-ordinate, and consequently people had treated him as though he was an imbecile. All the time his brain had wanted to scream out and tell people how he felt as he hated so much their condescending attitudes and the way he was treated like a child, but his body wouldn't accept the commands given from his brain. His mouth couldn't form the words, his hands couldn't hold what was offered him, and so he was locked in a world of incredible frustration.

This man wasn't a church-goer, but somehow he heard that Jesus Christ could heal him and I can't remember if he was in his own home or a friend's home but he cried out in his heart for God to do something in his life - and he was dramatically healed. He was a totally new man, and now he spent all his days whilst being on the dole distributing handbills and giving his testimony to as many people as he could meet in a day. He was 100% committed to God.

Supernatural Visitation

I turned to one of the other men in our small gathering and asked him to tell his story and was equally amazed by what he told me. Apparently he'd been a chronic alcoholic, and his slavery to drink had ruined his marriage and his life. He lived in a high-rise flat and was in constant fear of being broken into, consequently all his windows and doors were locked, bolted and even chained! He was watching the television one evening during a bout of drinking and went into the kitchen for something, and when he came back into his lounge he saw somebody seated on the settee. Panic rose within him and he ran to the door to see whether he'd left it open - and found that it was locked, bolted and chained.

He was baffled as to how this man had got into his house, and when he questioned him about what he was doing there, this man started to tell him all about his life and his inward feelings, telling him things he'd never shared with anybody. When asked who he was, the stranger replied that he was Jesus. The man sharing his testimony told of his complete astonishment, because up until then he'd been a confirmed atheist and had never given God a second thought, but what he was experiencing now had changed his life completely, and from that day forward, he never took a drink, and gave his whole life to God.

A Humbling Experience

I don't know how you would have felt if you had been listening to testimonies like these, but I felt a fraud. I had come into this working class church as a pompous, proud, arrogant Christian who had "a ministry from God". I had been brought up from the age of 9 in a church and been taught and indoctrinated with the scriptures, but what I was being faced with now were people who had met God, and instead of hearing second hand from a preacher, they'd had a personal revelation from God which I'd never experienced. The testimonies of these men really humbled me and I realised that my "holiness" was all self-righteousness. Up until now I'd always thought of myself as being "special", but now I was finding that I'd just had a good spiritual education.

"That's My Jesus"

A few years ago Maurice and I were invited to speak and sing during the first part of a Full Gospel Business Men's dinner, the main speaker being a man named Joe (Paddy) Whelan. It's not hard to feel important when you're invited to speak at a business dinner but when we had finished and Joe got up to give his testimony God reminded me yet again of the lesson He'd taught me in Birkenhead. Joe told of his life of crime and how after years of being in and out of prison for his many criminal acts he now found himself in solitary confinement because he'd taken a chisel to somebody in the prison whom he'd cut up so badly that he was totally unrecognisable. Solitary confinement is meant to be a very severe punishment, and during this time Joe didn't have visitors, priests, or ministers, and his meals were passed to him and taken away when he'd finished. I don't know how long he'd been in the punishment cell, but he said that one day he saw a tremendous light and Jesus Christ Himself visited him and dramatically changed his life.

I don't remember much of Joe's testimony, as it was quite a while ago when I heard it, but there was one phrase that he kept saying which seemed to hurt me every time he said it, and that was "That's my Jesus, that's my Jesus". He kept speaking about Jesus, not as though he'd read about Him, but as though he personally knew Him. His life was dramatically changed from black to white, his foul mouth was cleansed, his attitude changed and the following day after this tremendous experience he requested a Bible. The prison warders saw the transformation and knew that this was no con job. It was for real - Paddy had met Jesus.

Another Reminder

Only a couple of months ago I was again at a Prison Fellowship Rally at the Central Hall in Manchester where I was asked to sing, and once more I was reminded of the lesson God had taught me in Birkenhead because the main speaker was a man named Jimmy Rice who had no knowledge of God, was brought up in villainy and found himself in prison. This man didn't even know enough about Jesus to be embarrassed about being a Christian, and when Jesus

Christ Himself filled his cell with light one day and changed his life in a dramatic way, he found that his mouth was coming out with things that his mind hadn't even thought of. He rushed up to a prison warden and told him that he wanted to become a Christian, and that he would also need a Bible. Whilst he was having this conversation with the prison warden, other inmates were standing around with cigarettes hanging out of their mouths, absolutely bemused at what Jimmy was saying. But he was so ignorant about religion and Jesus Christ that he didn't even feel embarrassed to be talking about it! Jimmy's life was turned upside down because he had been met personally by Jesus Christ Himself and given a fresh start.

Inspiring People

I don't know what God feels about the majority of Christians who go to church these days, but from a personal point of view I can honestly say I find nothing more stimulating, inspiring and motivating than hearing the testimonies of people who have had personal encounters with God when they've had no previous religious instruction. I find their lifestyles challenging because they change dramatically from what they were to something totally different and they're usually not content to sit in a pew week after week soaking up sermons and reading

their daily portions of scriptures, but they avidly read the Bible as though it's a novel and take everything they read at face value - and put it into practice. When they've not been indoctrinated with religion they seem to have something fresh and real from God which makes them natural soul-winners because they're not putting on a pompous show and trying to be Christians, they're just natural and simply allow the changes that God has brought in their lives to shine through them.