

Barratt Ministries Challenge

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Fulfilling the Law - Part 2

Matthew 5:18

by Maurice Barratt

“Verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:18-20)

In the letter to the Romans, chapter 6, the apostle Paul has a lot to say about sin. Read the chapter and you will find that Paul states again and again that sin is the problem. Paul never says that the law is a problem. In fact, as we saw in the last issue, Paul is at pains to point out that the law is good, just, and holy. Here in chapter 6, it is sin, not the law, that needs dealing with.

“Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed”. The law is not destroyed. “He that is dead is free from sin” (not “free from the law”). “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin” (not “dead unto the law”). “Sin shall not have dominion over you” (not “the law shall not have dominion over you”) (6:6,7,11,14). “Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?” asks Paul. “God forbid!” (6:15). We are under grace, not under the law, but being under grace we become “servants of righteousness” (6:18). “Yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (6:19).

Jesus begins the words we are studying with “verily” — that is, truly, certainly, absolutely. It’s the first time Jesus uses the expression in the Sermon on the Mount. It’s emphatic and important. “... till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” A “jot” is Jod, the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet. A “tittle” is one of the tiny marks that occur over or under some of the letters. Nothing of the law is finished or destroyed, not even the smallest letter of it.

The Fixed State

When will “heaven and earth pass”? Not yet, certainly. Nor in the millennium. The law still holds good then. Only after the millennium will earth and heaven pass away and be replaced by the new heaven and earth. At that time a great change will take place, not just physically but spiritually. In the millennium men still have free will to obey or disobey. Jesus will, it seems, enforce obedience at that time, at least to some extent; he will “rule with a rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15). But when the new heaven and earth come, the final judgement has taken place, and everything is fixed for ever.

“He that is unjust, let him be unjust still ... he that is righteous, let him be righteous still” (Revelation 22:11). In eternity we understand that there is no more chance of forgiveness or repentance, no more chance for change. Nothing can change; it’s a fixed state. So there can be no “free will” or choice in the sense that we understand it now, the choice to obey or disobey. That is why the law is finished with when heaven and earth pass away. Our eternal future is not a return to the garden of Eden with its two trees and its choice of obedience or disobedience. It’s not a return to a former state. God never returns to the former things. He is always doing “a new thing”. Everything is moving on to perfection in God’s process, until “all be fulfilled”. The law will pass away one day. But until then, it still stands.

Teaching And Doing

Jesus thus reaches a conclusion. Because the law shall not pass until “all be fulfilled”, Jesus says, “Therefore whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.” Notice that Jesus says “whoever breaks them and teaches men to break them”. To break a commandment may be weakness. But to teach others to break them is rebellion; it’s self-justification, self-righteousness. Jesus and his disciples all taught by example. What they taught, they also did. Jesus lived with his disciples. They learned not only his teachings and beliefs but his lifestyle. Paul was the same. He said to Timothy, “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions ...” (2 Timothy 3:10); and he was scathing of those who taught but did not do: “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? Thou that preachest that a man should not steal, dost thou steal?” (Romans 2:21).

Keeping The Outward

The Pharisees had one point in their favour. They at least kept the outward letter of the law. We have somehow come to the strange belief that when Jesus said our righteousness “must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees”, he meant that our righteousness was a kind of alternative to that of the Scribes and Pharisees; theirs was through the law, ours is through grace. Not so! “Exceed” means “do more than, do over and above”. We must do at least what they do, and more. They kept the outward letter of the law, we must keep the letter and the spirit of it. That’s far more demanding! It calls for great love, great sacrifice, great faith, great compassion, great patience. Yet, Jesus says, if we can’t keep the spirit of the law, “the weightier matters”, as Jesus put it (Matthew 23:23), we cannot even enter the kingdom of heaven! It’s certainly not for those who say “Lord, Lord”, but do not live the lifestyle that matches their words. But we should not forget that the Pharisees were not wrong to keep the outward observances. Jesus never criticised them for that. He told the people, “The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore that they bid you observe, that observe and do” (Matthew 23:2,3). He told the Pharisees, “Ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgement, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.”

Reasonable Service

So we ought to do the outward and the inward. That's the New Testament fulfilling of the law. It's more than just presenting ourselves outwardly to God. "I beseech you ... that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). It's only reasonable, Paul says, to do this. We think it's exceptional! But we must actually do more! Paul shows us in the next verse that we are also to present our minds to God — to do the inward as well as the outward. I have a teaching tape devoted to these two verses, called "God's Will". If you have not heard it, I think you will find it helpful to understand these concepts of what God wants of us, the letter and the spirit, the outward and the inward.

You see, unless our inward motives and desires are radically changed, the outward won't really change. The Pharisees who kept the law outwardly ended up crucifying Christ. So will we, sooner or later, if we don't crucify ourselves. Either we crucify ourselves or we crucify Christ. It's in the heart that the answer lies. That is really the conclusion to these two messages about the law. Only the heart is capable of fulfilling the law. That's where the Pharisees went wrong: with their lips and their hands they obeyed the outward letter of the law; but their hearts, as God said through the prophet, "are far from me". Someone once said that in every person's heart there are two things: a throne, and a cross. Either we are on the throne, and Jesus is on the cross, or we are on the cross, and Jesus is on the throne. The choice, while free will still exists, is ours to make today.

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

We Must Learn To Discern

"Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men to do so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19). If, like me, you are one of those people who feel the call of God on your life, you too will recognise that the call didn't just appear the day you got saved. As I look back over my life I am constantly amazed at the way God has influenced my thoughts and actions even from a very early age. I can still remember very clearly Miss Hadfield, a dear old spinster, teaching me and the other 42 children in my infant class to recite the Lord's Prayer, and other familiar scriptures like Psalm 23, before we started our daily lessons. My little heart used to glow when I heard Bible stories and I could just imagine myself doing exploits like David and Elijah. I must have been around 6 or 7 when someone from Brownwood Hall Brethren Church came to my school giving out invitations for children's meetings. I soaked up what I was taught, loving every minute of it. I had tried Brownies and Guides but nothing captured my interest like these meetings.

Teachers of Truth?

I always thought of school as being a very strange place. On the one hand they would teach me very moral and practical things which were helpful to me, like reading, writing, safety, manners, etc. But on the other hand they tried to take from me the things which I treasured most, like the truth and authority of the Bible. I will never forget my lessons on evolution. I was so astonished that a teacher did not believe God created the heaven and the earth, animals, men and women, and all the vegetation, and that it happened in six days, that I didn't take in anything at all about what he was trying to teach me. When it came to examination time at the end of term I was questioned on what I had learned about evolution, but it all seemed like a big joke and I couldn't answer the paper seriously. I can remember to this day writing as my answer to one of the questions, "If you believe your uncle was an ape, that's fine by me - but mine wasn't!" Obviously, I failed my examination, and throughout most of my schooling I didn't receive good marks for R.E. exams, and yet I was certain that I knew my Bible better than any of my other classmates.

I used to pray about my R.E. class, as I honestly wasn't trying to be obstinate. I really did want good results in my exams, but to me R.E. wasn't an academic subject, it was something I was emotionally involved with, and I found it impossible to answer with the lies I had been taught just to get good results, rather than the truth which I knew would give me a bad report. As a youngster I found this conflict very difficult to handle and my teacher made it blatantly obvious that as far as he was concerned I was just a frustrating nuisance - so much for a Christian witness! Fortunately, school life is full of changes, and each September didn't only afford me the opportunity to be in a new class, I was also given different teachers for nearly all of my subjects. One year I had the brilliant experience of having a Christian teacher who didn't only go through the school curriculum from a believer's point of view, but he left his classes in no doubt whatsoever about the gospel message, and afforded his pupils ample opportunity to give their lives to Jesus. Whilst he was my teacher I was always top of the class in my exams.

The Greatest Influence

As I look back over my life I have made some amazing discoveries. Although I was always witnessing as a child (a thing we were encouraged to do) and took friends to church who sometimes made a commitment to Jesus, none of them to my knowledge ever continued in their Christian faith. I also noticed that the kids I made friends with at church or in my youth club never encouraged me to become stronger in my faith and in fact very few of them survived in Christianity themselves. The big influences in my life were always people older than myself, people with experience, people with wisdom. Having a Christian teacher for a few terms helped me tremendously to overcome all the difficulties I encountered at school. But the biggest influence in my life was my godly pastor, with whom I developed a very close and personal relationship. At the age of 16 he was made my legal guardian, and he took his responsibilities very seriously. Because there was a lot of rebuilding to do in my life, he spent a great deal of time with me, and even as it was happening I could feel my mentality change. I am firmly convinced that if we are to grow like Christ, whatever age we are, we need an experienced godly influence to both look up to and follow.

Our Ungodly World

I'm extremely grateful to God that I have managed to fight through all my difficulties and have been ordained to the ministry. In my capacity as a minister I have travelled the world with my husband and have seen from first hand experience that the world is far worse now than it was when I was growing up. Some years ago I was asked to sing in a prison in Scotland. It was a very secure prison, guards were posted all around the room. My audience was made up of lads between the ages of 18-21, and out of the 50 that were present, 18 were in for murder. This year I was involved in a world can only teach your prison outreach in Leicester and in this particular prison every inmate had been admitted for murder or manslaughter. And only last weekend I was informed about an incident in a women's prison where one of the inmates, after having refused to hand over her drugs, was raped by a gang of women.

Manchester, my home town, is not only proud of the fact that we have our own gay city, but we have also been awarded the "privilege" of holding the first gay Olympics. We also have one of the biggest abortion problems in Europe. Homosexual and lesbian couples are legally looked upon as a sound basis for adopting children. And did you know ...

750 pornographic computer disks were seized by police in Dunstable from a school where they were traded by children as young as 11. (The Independent, 23.9.93)

A Manchester City Council trip for young people aged 13 years upward included a tour of Amsterdam's Red Light District. (Manchester Evening News, 12.8.94)

In November 1993 police found sixth formers from a Bradford school making copies of pornographic material which they had stored on the hard disk of a school computer. The disks seized frequently showed images of children, bestiality, rape and torture, and were being sold to other pupils. (Sunday Times, 5.12.95)

50% of 8,500 schools involved in a recent study admitted that computer pornography had been available to their pupils, some as young as 8 years. (University of Lancaster Study, 1993)

A 13 year old boy attempted to rape a 6-year-old girl after watching computer pornography at school, (Daily Telegraph, 22.9.94)

14 year old GCSE English pupils were given a book in which a teenager has an abortion after being gang-raped and the foetus is incinerated alive. After reading the book in question, a member of the House of Commons Select Committee said, "No rational adult would want their 15-year-old child exposed to this degrading and obscene material" (Sunday Express, 16.5.93)

No more than 5% of Secondary Schools observe the legal requirement for morning prayers. (Daily Telegraph, 13.9.94)

The existence of one God is now being denied in children's teaching. Even the Boy Scout movement and the Girl Guides have changed their Promise. No longer do they honour God, but rather "Your God", implying that there are many gods and that we select our God. Children and young people are being encouraged to use ouija boards through which they make contact with evil spirits, and all over the country counsellors are having to minister to young people whose lives have been damaged in

this way. Young children who were taught about Jesus are now being confused with a plethora of teaching about other religions. Often they are being encouraged to pray to other gods. Many of them are being supplied with books on witches and the occult which at first appear to be harmless, but which open the way to real trauma in later life.

Bullying in schools has grown so alarmingly that a special organization has been set up to combat it. A girl of 12 was found hanged following teasing and taunting by schoolmates about her red hair. (The Times, 29.9.94)

Sexual assaults are now occurring in school playgrounds. A 14-year-old boy who tried to kill his 10-year-old cousin in a brutal sex attack was ordered to be detained indefinitely. (The Independent, 4.10.94)

(These statistics are taken from the booklet "What on earth are we doing to our children?", published by the Maranatha Community.)

It is the responsibility of parents to protect children from aspects of adult life that they cannot understand. Failure to do this can easily damage the vulnerable emotions of the young. Sadly, this responsibility is not accepted by some who exercise a strong influence on our children. Judy Blume, author of children's books which have appalled many parents with reference to explicit sex, has specifically stated, "I hate the idea that you should always protect children." (Quoted by Marie Winn in "Children Without Childhood"). She defends herself from angry critics by saying, "Children are their own best censors." (Lynda Lee-Potter column, Daily Mail, 4.12.91)

Christian Education

When I was pregnant with my first child I experienced for the very first time what an incredible instinct God had put within every mother to protect their offspring. During the first years of Nathan's life we developed a wonderful close relationship, but the problem of his future education seemed to loom over my head like a dark cloud. As soon as my child had turned 3 it was constantly on my mind. To send him to secular school was totally unthinkable, as I knew what he would be subjected to. Apart from the drugs and bullying which are so prevalent in the Manchester schools I knew that his religious education would be so multi-faith he would end up totally confused. As far as sex education is concerned I am totally convinced that the gay lifestyle is a diabolical perversion of God's order. Under no circumstances was I prepared for my child to be taught that he had a choice of being heterosexual, homosexual or bisexual, and I was certainly opposed to him being taught by gay people. The bible is very clear when it says "Train up a child in the way that he should go, and he will not depart from it".

Training is far more time-consuming than mere telling. When my husband trained to be an international gymnast his trainer would explain the moves and then stick with him until what was initially impossible for Maurice eventually became second nature, and he could even do it without the trainer's supervision. This is the way God expects us to train our children so that even when we are not there they can do what we have trained them to do. To home-school my own child would require much discipline on my part, and I didn't feel adequate. But as time went on I became more aware of Christian education, and although I knew that this would cost money, I felt that I had no

alternative. I now have peace in my spirit that Nathan is being educated by Christian teachers, people who know Jesus Christ as their own personal Saviour, and view teaching children as a task pleasing to God.

My heart swells with gratitude to God for leading me to this place whenever I see the scripture texts on the walls and listen to the children reciting their learning passages. It is wonderful to realise that every subject relates to God. But it was only when I endeavoured to promote Christian education that I began to understand what it was all about. Because Christian schools are not financed by the government, they are self-supporting, and therefore much smaller than the secular schools. Yet because the classes are so small, the children are in actual fact receiving an almost personal education, and statistics show that they are on average 3 years ahead of other children their own age who attend secular schools. The children are disciplined and orderly and even able to work without supervision (a government inspector saw this for himself just recently and couldn't contain his astonishment). But above all the aim for the children is not to pursue their own career, but to prepare them to be useful and available for God. As Christians, I'm sure that's what we all want for our children.

If you want to make sacrifices for your children, and most parents do, then don't waste your efforts on earthly, carnal things. Let your sacrifice have eternal value. Who knows, you may have given birth to a John Wesley, a Billy Graham, a David Wilkerson, or a Richard Wurmbrand; and surely these children are worth investing in! Hand your children to the world and they'll become worldly, because the world can only teach worldly values. Make the sacrifice to bring them up in a godly way, and you will surely reap what you sow.