

Barratt Ministries Challenge

Issue 41

The Light Of The Body

Sermon on the Mount Series, Matthew 6:22,23

by Maurice Barratt

“The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold, but the Lord trieth the hearts” (Proverbs 17:3).

We are still in the section of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus is dealing with the roots of covetousness in our hearts. But in the next issues, we will see how he moves on to deal with our minds - our conscious thinking. Let me remind you of the principle: in the bible “the heart” refers to our subconscious thinking, motives, intents and desires, whereas “the mind” refers to our conscious, deliberately chosen thoughts. The verses we are considering here form a link between the section on the heart and the section on the mind.

Jesus states it as a plain fact: The light of the body is the eye. In other words, there is no alternative. All the light the body has, it gets from the eye. The eye is crucial, and powerful, enabling all direction and movement. You don't walk backwards; you move in the direction your eye sees. The eyes are drawn to light; even with your eyes closed you can tell when a room is plunged into darkness or a light switched on. And it's the same with spiritual sight. Spiritually, we are also drawn towards spiritual light, towards revelation, towards “enlightenment”. It may be a false light - falsehood masquerading as truth - but everyone is in some sort of light. The devil offers light to people, not darkness, for he comes as “an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). It's just that his light is false light; his revelations are designed to trap, to lead to enslavement and eventually to hell. But it is “enlightenment” that he offers, not darkness. Buddhists also seek after “enlightenment”. And everyone, religious or not, feels that they have some light, some understanding of truth “what is right”. No-one considers themselves to be in darkness. “Every way of man is right in his own eyes ...” says Proverbs 21:2; however, it then adds: “... but the Lord pondereth the hearts”. God will test the nature of each person's “light”.

The eye is the doorway to the heart. What gets into the heart, gets there through the eyes. Jesus has touched on this already in the Sermon on the Mount, in connection with lust and covetousness: “Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). The eye and the heart are inextricably linked, and if you want to guard your heart, your eye is the key. Therefore, Jesus says, “If your eye offend you, pluck it out” (Matthew 5:29). I suppose a blind person can be potentially as covetous as anyone with sight, but surely we could say that they have an advantage, being free from the temptations which come through the eyes. John specifically marks out “the lust of the eyes” as being “not of the Father, but of the world” (1 John 2:16).

I believe that the devil has no direct access to our hearts. God has; but I believe that the devil can only gain access to the secret “inner chamber” of our hearts through the outward senses - from the

outside in. That is why eastern meditation techniques are so dangerous. People strive to empty their minds and enter altered states of consciousness, and by doing so they are deliberately shutting off the protective mechanisms put into us by God to guard our spirits from possession and infiltration, so evil spirits gain easy entrance to the unprotected heart. No wonder God advises us to guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23), for we can allow wrong things in through our senses - through what we hear or what we see. Jesus also warned, "Take heed what ye hear" (Mark 4:24). The two senses of sight and sound are the two "receivers" which can cause untold damage to our hearts. But it seems the eye is more easily tempted, and more easily deceived. God works through hearing. Faith comes "by hearing", not "by seeing". Jesus spoke much, but he was not pleased that Thomas needed to see in order to believe, and he would have no truck with people who wanted to see "a sign".

A "single" eye means pure, unmixed, unalloyed, not "double-minded". The single eye, like the pure heart, only sees good. "To the pure all things are pure" (Titus 1:15). In all circumstances, even in trials and problems, the single eye sees only God at work, not the devil. If you know that God is in charge, you need never blame the devil for what happens to you. God has his purpose in it all; if you have a single eye, you know that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28). You see things "in the light of" that scripture. We know what it means to "see things in a different light" - with a new understanding, which may entirely change our perception of a circumstance. "Oh", we say, "I can see it all in a different light now!" What has changed is not the situation, but our perception of it, our light.

Seeing with a single eye, seeing things in God's light, we have contentment, and are drawn towards treasures in heaven. But an evil, impure eye pulls us towards covetousness, towards treasures on earth. In Genesis 1, God saw with his pure eye that his creation was good. "God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). But in Genesis 3, Eve saw the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and when she "saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise", she disobeyed God. Both physical and spiritual sight were at work here. Eve's physical eyes told her that the fruit looked desirable, and her spiritual eyes caught a glimpse of something else desirable - wisdom. She coveted that wisdom in her heart. She wanted that enlightenment, but she did not realize how much harm it would do her.

It was subtle. The serpent offered Eve light, not darkness. He offered revelation, enlightenment, understanding, wisdom. It was physically and spiritually attractive. "Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). And the serpent was not lying, as Eve discovered when covetousness in her heart led (as it always does) to physical action, and she took the fruit and ate it, and gave it to Adam: "And the eyes of them both were opened" (verse 7). It was light; but it was not the light God wanted them to have. And when light is gained through disobedience, rebellion, or covetousness, God calls this light "darkness". "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23). What Jesus is saying is: if the light, the revelation, the understanding which you have, is actually darkness, that's a very serious condition, because you think you're in the light when you're not. The man who knows he is in the dark is in darkness of a sort; but the man who doesn't know he's in the dark is in a far greater darkness. This is spiritual blindness. The Pharisees were spiritually blind, even though they had the light of God's law, and in reality, they were in terrible darkness: Jesus called them "blind leaders of the blind" (Matthew 15:14). The devil is also a blind leader of the blind, and he too will "fall into the ditch" in the end,

because he will finish up in the lake of fire. He doesn't have true light; rebelliousness and covetousness have blinded his heart.

Each of us shares Eve's covetous heart, and our eyes are always drawn towards our treasure.

It is crucial that Jesus and his kingdom are our treasure: "looking unto Jesus", (Hebrews 12:2) "looking for that blessed hope", (Titus 2:13), like Abraham who "looked for a city whose builder and maker was God" (Hebrews 11:10); for "unto them that look for him shall he appear" (Hebrews 9:28). "Look up, for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28) ... Scripture is full of exhortations to look, and what to look at. Many in the ministry have started out pure and "single-eyed", looking at the right things, but they became distracted when their eyes saw something else: the results and rewards of ministry - fame and financial blessing - and they became corrupted and covetous, and "ran greedily after the way of Balaam for reward" (Jude 11).

Satan offered Eve light, and he offered Jesus light, when he "showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (Matthew 4:8). Satan had to show them to Jesus, not to prove how powerful he was (Jesus knew that), but because Jesus had to see them. Satan wanted covetousness to enter Jesus' heart through his eyes. But Jesus proved what was in his heart by what came out of his mouth. This is significant. Whatever gets into the heart, gets there through the eyes; but whatever is in the heart will come out through the mouth. Your words will always betray your heart. Jesus told the Pharisees it was impossible for them to speak good things, because their hearts were wicked. "How can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34).

Guard carefully what you see with your eyes, and what you hear in conversation, because those things will find their way into your heart, and then out of your mouth. The eyes and ears are, in one way, the sentries or guardians of the heart. When they're "open", they allow things in. But they are not the ultimate controlling force. You, with your conscious mind, can make decisions about what you see and hear. And this shows us the link between these studies of the heart, and the following verses, in which Jesus talks about the mind, about how we should consciously think. What you allow into your heart will become a part of you, subconscious, rooted in your hidden desires and motives. But with your mind, you determine what you will allow in, and what you will turn your eyes towards. In Proverbs 23:26, God gives us his wisdom, the true light that will guide us into the path where we truly see: "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways."

Experiences From Life

by Joanna Barratt

THERE'S NO SMOKE WITHOUT FIRE

Have you ever heard that expression, 'there's no smoke without fire'? Do you believe it? Is there any possible way you can get smoke without fire? This quotation is regularly used when someone

has been accused of doing something which they adamantly deny. If enough stink is created then people will believe the worst, whether it's truth or libel. I personally have no regard for this statement at all, especially after witnessing first hand an experience of 'smoke without fire'.

A few years ago my husband, Maurice, had a brainstorming idea to knock down the ceiling which divided the attic from the first floor rooms. The house we live in is over 150 years old so he was prepared for a little muck and dust! He made sure that the rooms which housed expensive recording equipment and computers were securely sealed with masking tape, etc., around the doors edges and under the doors, and then he, together with a couple of big bruisers, wielded their sledge hammers as they undertook their demolition work.

We had already warned the hospital next door that there could be some dust coming from our upstairs windows and suggested that it might be wise for them to close the windows of their premises which overlooked our house, but we hadn't anticipated the centuries' worth of dust looking just like smoke to come billowing from the open window for all the neighbourhood to see. The amount of smoke was unbelievable, so unbelievable that the hospital receptionist rang immediately for the fire brigade as she was convinced our house was on fire. Sure enough 3 fire engines pulled into our drive and firemen rushed into our courtyard and up the scaffolding ready to burst into the blazing rooms with their hoses.

Horrified at the catastrophe which could really have taken place if they managed to do what they intended, Maurice (who could only be identified by his height and voice, as his face other than the whites of his eyes was completely black) pleaded with them not to break the seals on the doors and tried to convince these men that this was not smoke from a fire, but fine dust. It took Maurice what seemed ages for these men to at least give his story some consideration, because they were trained to believe there was no smoke without fire.

The fire chief went to the sealed doors and felt all around the edges for signs of heat, and with great reluctance he declined from smashing through the doors to see with his own eyes that there was no danger. Maurice had really had to plead and grovel for this man to give way because the responsibility was his, but after the chief had looked at the work in progress and the state of the workers, he left the premises peacefully.

I am really grateful for that experience because now I firmly believe that in many cases there is smoke without fire. We are often so ready to judge by appearances but have no real understanding of the situation. I personally, have been in that place where people have believed for years something about me even though it was a lie.

One particular instance of this was where a mother and her 2 daughters were very angry at me for something they said I had spoken from the platform during a meeting which took place years and years ago. When I was faced up with the accusation some time ago, I thought at the time it was a pretty unreasonable thing to charge me with because I just couldn't imagine myself saying it. But, because 3 people had been adamant I decided to ring up the man who used to record all the meetings and asked if he had a copy of the service on this date. Sure enough he had a copy and said he would mail it to me. I listened through and found that their accusation had been totally unjust and let them listen to the tape for themselves. I must admit though, that I had not anticipated what they would say after they'd heard it for themselves. One of the daughters told me that she had

edited tapes herself and removed or included things, so she felt sure that I had done the same. Even though I assured her she could ring the man who kept the master tapes for herself, she wanted to remain convinced of her grievance against me which proved to me that some people just don't want to see and prefer to remain in their wilful blindness.

This incident which I experienced is not isolated, I know that many other people's reputations have been greatly tarnished and sometimes completely killed because someone got the wrong end of the stick or become jealous and stubbornly refused to gain a clear understanding of a situation.

I can recall vividly another man who was mightily used by God in Holland to build up a great evangelistic organisation which incorporated a block of offices with around 50 full time workers and churches in 13 different Dutch cities. His fame had spread throughout Holland as, due to his zeal to reach the lost, he was also relaying weekly programmes of his church services on cable television which he knew were being viewed by prostitutes and others with real agonising problems who would not have openly gone to church. This man really and truly had a heart for the lost and spent his life working for God relentlessly in this way. He also had 2 orphanages in India and Indonesia.

He trained up men around him to take care of the churches and orphanages and met with them on a daily basis to keep them in mind of his vision. But the inevitable happened and one of the men who had worked with him for over 30 years and was really close to him, rose up against him and caused a tremendous split, taking over half the congregations and workers away to follow his own particular vision. Not only was he bent on pulling people away but he began a smear campaign and spread despicable rumours concerning this man's sexual and financial dealings. The whole organisation was plunged into turmoil and confusion as the cancer spread through it.

But it didn't stop there. Because the man was so well known the government were involved and they took out what is called a "black book" against him and made a thorough investigation of all the allegations and accusations made against him. This investigation went on for quite some time and interviews were even reported on the national T.V. channels. To some Dutch people he was famous, but to others he was infamous. But one thing was sure, everyone was aware of this man and his work for God. At the end of the investigation he was publicly cleared which was a tremendous relief to everyone who had pledged their allegiance to him and stayed. But to others it didn't make a blind bit of difference, as far as they were concerned he was still guilty and even more angry and bitter now that his name had been nationally cleared.

As for the man himself, he didn't have a bad word to say of his enemies. In fact on one occasion when he was waiting for the traffic lights to turn green, he began to laugh as a thought he'd had tickled him. The family members in his car asked why he laughed and he said to them, "Do you realise just how many churches we have started in Holland?" What a wonderful attitude this man had. He really did take literally that scripture that "all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose" and could see through God's eyes the positive side of this terrible incident.

A short time later the man passed into the presence of the Lord, but the intriguing thing about his death was that the members of his own congregation were informed of his death not from the church platform, but via the major national television networks when they reported it in their News programmes. The church could not contain those who wanted to pay their last respects to him, and

the traffic in The Hague was stopped as the procession, escorted by the police, made their way to the grave side. What a tremendous testimony and witness to the nation this man had been during his life and even in his death.

It is very sad that there is so much evil speaking and gossip in the church, the very place where we have the Bible as our textbook which gives clear guidance as to how we should handle these situations. Sadly, going to church does not make a person a Christian, any more than living in a garage would make a person a car. But those who would follow Christ and seek to do His will should close their ears to gossip and slander and rebuke the offenders for passing on this undesired information because what comes in through our ears has a frightening way of plummeting deep into our hearts and remaining there, only to permanently affect our manner towards those we have heard things about.

That goes for our eyes too. I have been amazed at how stained and blotted my mind can become after a short visit to the dentist. Sometimes I have picked up a magazine from the table because a headline on the front page caught my eye, but after flicking through the magazine to get to the article which had first attracted me I have been amazed at the smut and filth which has managed to become everyday public reading for all and sundry, when at one time such things would have been withheld for the Playboy and such ill-reputed magazines. And all I'd looked at was the once innocent and wholesome Woman and Woman's Own, not to mention others displayed openly such as She and Cosmopolitan!

I'm very thankful also that I don't have a television to bombard my incredibly impressionable children with all kinds of ideas. I don't know how T.V. owning parents cope at Christmas with all the adverts telling the kids that they can't live without certain things. Parents think nothing of spending £100 on a computer game these days, quite apart from the brand named clothing and trainers which are also a must. I was shocked to see how turned on to Lucozade my 2 boys aged 8 and 5 were after seeing Lara Toft glaring at them from the hoardings as they travelled to and from school each day - and they don't even particularly like the taste of the stuff!

The pressure we allow ourselves to be under because we willingly drink in all we're exposed to is amazing, and the only escape is to live for the future kingdom and not for this world. If you want to know more of what I'm talking about here you'll have to get your hands on a copy of the new book Manifesto For A Revolution written by Alex Robertson which we have just published. Get your mind off what you see with your physical eyes and hear with your physical ears and look to the future which should be the only reality to a true Christian.