

## **Barratt Ministries Challenge**

**Issue no. 48**

### **DON'T GIVE HOLY THINGS TO DOGS**

**Sermon on the Mount Series, Matthew 7:6**

*by Maurice Barratt*

This little verse in Matthew 7 is a paragraph on its own. It reads like a proverb, or even a parable. There is wisdom there, but the meaning is not necessarily obvious. The Sermon on the Mount is perfectly in order, and our understanding of this verse will depend on our appreciation of what Jesus has already said in the previous chapters. Like gold, it needs to be mined deep.

For example, the two statements, "Give not that which is holy to the dogs", and "Neither cast your pearls before swine", seem at first glance to be just two ways of saying the same thing. But Jesus never says two things when one will do, and I believe that these two sentences have different applications. Put briefly, I believe that giving holy things to dogs is about natural, physical things, and casting pearls before swine is about spiritual things.

How do we tackle the interpretation of a verse like this? In the bible, parables often actually interpret themselves, if you know the rest of the bible, if you have understanding of the key words. In that light, I want to examine the two key words in the sentence, "holy" and "dogs".

#### **Holy Things**

First of all, what is "holy"? Note that Jesus is talking about holy things, "that which is holy". Under the Old Covenant, it was clear. A holy thing or person was one which was separated exclusively for God's use. This applied to:

1) Objects. The vessels used in the service of the temple, for example, the spoons and dishes, were only like other spoons and dishes that could be found outside the temple. But they had been touched by the anointing oil, and they were holy, that is, separated exclusively for use in the temple. It would have been wrong to use them for anything else.

2) Times and seasons. "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20.8). The seventh day was a holy day, a day to be separated exclusively for God; and there were other days and seasons of "holy convocations", days when the people separated themselves from work and ordinary daily tasks to dedicate their time exclusively to God. To do work on the holy day, even gathering sticks for a fire, was an offence. It may have seemed harmless, but it violated the law of separation.

3) People. God chose Israel as "a holy nation" (Exodus 19.6) He wanted a people separated for himself, different from every other nation: "a peculiar treasure unto me above all people" (Exodus 19.5). And within Israel, there were people specifically called out to be still more "holy"—the priests and Levites, who lived under special laws separating them further from the rest of the people.

But that was all under the Old Covenant; and we are under the New Covenant, the old is done away—now there are no special things or people or times which are holy, are there? Well, actually, the answer is yes, there are!

Firstly, there are still holy people. Peter says to Christians, “You are a holy nation” (1 Peter 2.9). In fact, Peter is quoting from the verse in Exodus to which I referred earlier. Nothing has changed in this regard from the Old Covenant to the New. We are still called to be holy, separated for God’s use. “Be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1.15,16). “Holy” means the same as it always did.

What about times and seasons? Isn’t every day holy now? No, that’s one answer that can’t be true, because by definition, that which is holy is separated from other similar things which are not holy. That which is holy only has an identity because it is set apart from that which is not holy. If all days are holy, then none are holy, because none is specially set apart.

### **The Sabbath**

We ought to consider the sabbath, because it is a strange anomaly that we keep the other nine of the Ten Commandments—and we would strongly argue that it is right to do so, and wrong to not do so—but we lay aside the sabbath as being part of the Old Covenant. In fact the sabbath was instituted long before the Old Covenant; it was instituted at creation. If we agree that the laws instituted under the Old Covenant lasted as long as that covenant lasted, then by the same token, shouldn’t the laws instituted at creation last as long as this creation lasts? “God blessed the sabbath day and sanctified it” (Genesis 2.3)—that is, he made it holy. So when did it become unholy? These are things we ought to think about.

Again, if I decide to set apart a week for prayer and fasting to seek God, is that not by definition a holy time? I’m separating myself from work and other cares, I’ll ensure that I keep myself separate from those things in order to exclusively give the time to God. That’s a holy season.

Lastly, what about inanimate objects? Can things still be holy? By our definition, which is the biblical definition, if they are separated exclusively for God’s use, then yes. 100 years ago, Christians were not happy for their church building to be used for anything except the service of God. Were they wrong to think like that? Certainly there is nothing magic in the fabric of the building that makes it into a “sacred place”, but what’s wrong with dedicating a building exclusively for God’s use? People in the world make plenty of places that are reserved and dedicated exclusively for certain things, and they are not called “legalistic” because they do that. So a building, a musical instrument, or any “thing” can be “holy”—if it is used only for God. What we cannot do is call something holy when we sometimes use it for God and sometimes for other purposes.

### **Dogs**

The other key word in our sentence is “dogs”. In scripture, there is not much reference to dogs, but what there is sends out a clear signal.

In Deuteronomy 23.17-18 a dog refers to a homosexual. "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the Lord ..." The clear inference is that the "dog" in verse 18 is the "sodomite" of the previous verse.

In 2 Peter 2.21 it is "the dog" who "returns to his own vomit". (Interestingly, the next sentence talks about swine, as in our verse in Matthew.) Peter is talking of false prophets, seducers in the church. The dogs are the unholy and unclean in amongst the holy and the clean. In Matthew 15.26, Jesus said to the Canaanite woman that it was not right to take the children's (Israel's) food and give it to dogs (the unclean gentiles). When the final separation is made between holy and unholy, "Outside [the city] are dogs" (Revelation 22.15). "Dogs" are contemptible, outcast, debased, unclean, unholy.

### **What Is Unholy?**

We have asked what is holy today. Now we must ask what is unholy or unclean. One general answer is that anything in this world's system is unclean, because it is an unholy world under an unholy ruler, the prince of this world. So it must be wrong to mix the politics of this world with the kingdom of God. It must be wrong to mix worldly ambition with Christianity. There are plenty of exhortations in the New Testament to separate ourselves from uncleanness. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be separate [holy], saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Corinthians 6.14-17).

Have we given holy things to dogs? What holy things, today in the 21st century, have we mixed with the unholy and unclean? I want to suggest 6 areas where we ought to examine ourselves.

#### **1. Money.**

Our money is our own, to do with as we wish. Ananias and Sapphira, as new Christians, decided to give money to God. They were under no obligation to do so. But they did wrong, because they lied when they said they were giving everything. They had held back part of the money for themselves. They said all their money was dedicated to God when it wasn't. In other words, they called holy what was not holy. And that was enough for God to strike them dead. (See Acts 5.1-11.)

#### **2. Talents.**

The same principle applies to our talents. They are our own, and we can choose to use them for God or for other purposes. For instance, a musician may play in the worship group at church and also work in clubs in the world. But if he voluntarily chooses to dedicate his talent and his instrument to God, it should be exclusively for God. We mustn't kid ourselves about "dedication", or we may be just as guilty as Ananias and Sapphira.

### **3. Our Church Buildings.**

The church is not the building. The church is us. But shouldn't the building where we meet be a holy building, separated for God? Often we are keen to bring the unsaved into the church for evangelistic meetings. But really, evangelistic meetings should be outside the church. Jesus said "Go into all the world and preach", not "bring all the world into the church and preach to them". They become part of the church when they accept the gospel, and then they can be baptised in the church, receive teaching in the church, have fellowship in the church, break bread in the church. But the church are the "called out" ones, the separated ones, and our meeting places should also be pure.

### **4. Our Homes.**

Through the medium of television, we can bring all sorts of ungodly, unholy and unclean things into our homes. Don't you want your home to be a peaceful, godly, pure place where the Spirit of God is present and everybody who enters comes under that influence? But it can't be separate if there are newspapers full of gossip and scandal, books of dubious content, and television all letting the world into your living room!

### **5. Our Ministry.**

God sometimes sets apart individuals in a special way. "And as they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13.2). Paul and Barnabas were set apart, holy, in a special way. They now had to keep themselves holy, that is, exclusively dedicated to that work. Other work permitted to other Christians was not permitted to them. Similarly the apostles, seeing that there were many physical needs to be attended to amongst the believers, appointed ministers and deacons to those tasks, and separated themselves for preaching and prayer alone. "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6.4).

### **6. Our Bodies.**

Finally we come to a special case, because this is not a matter of voluntary choice. Our bodies are holy. They belong exclusively to God. "You are not your own, you are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6.20). Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are actually the only physical "territory" which God currently possesses on earth. That's why Paul is so strong to urge us to "flee fornication. Every sin which a man does is outside the body; but he that commits fornication sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6.18). It is a terrible thing to defile God's temple, that is, to compromise its purity. Don't let the dogs have it, or share it. Keep it pure, dedicated and separated exclusively for God.

## **EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE**

*by Joanna Barratt*

### **What's Holy About Me?**

Some years ago when working at an advertising agency I was shocked to hear one of the directors' secretaries, who had the foulest mouth I have yet to come across, say she was really sorry for swearing in front of me. When she saw me gape at her apology she quickly said, "Well, you're holy, aren't you", and she was deadly serious. She wasn't teasing or mocking in any way. That was her picture of me, even though it wasn't mine. When we give our lives to Jesus, we separate ourselves from the world (or should do) and Jesus in us walks a different way to the way we always walked before. Our conversation, attitudes and behaviour become different. That's the proof that Jesus is in us. We ARE holy whether we like it or not.

I loved working at the advertising agency as I met with so many eccentric and wacky people. It was an education which excited me. And God really used me in this place to witness to these people, many of the staff came to church with me on various occasions and a prayer group was set up in the firm which I ran. It was quite a blow when God told me that He wanted me to leave and, living by faith, work full-time for Him. For one thing the wages were not the same, I was used to earning and spending my own money in whatever way pleased me, but now God sent people to provide all my needs, and in His view I really didn't have many needs, just food, clothes and somewhere to live.

### **Going Against God**

After a few years I got bored a of not being able to buy nice Christmas presents and the little extras that are so appealing, so I took on a part-time job in a supermarket—just 4 hours a day. I loved it. I got on well with the staff and was earning my own money again. I started working there in the October and was put on the cash tills. In those days I had to off-load the goods from the counter and stack the trolleys for the customers, but was handling heavy items with one hand like turkeys, tins of biscuits and jars of sweets and chocolates. Before long I had strained my shoulder and ended up with a "frozen shoulder". I was in agony, unable even to comb or wash my hair without unbelievable pain. I couldn't possibly continue working in my condition and the doctor, who prescribed heat treatment (to defrost me!) told me to lay off all work for at least 6 weeks. Because I was a part-timer and had only been at the store for 3 months they said I had to leave as they couldn't leave my job open for me. I was really sick, but I knew instinctively that this was a result of my going against God's wishes when He told me to live by faith. I hadn't seen it as rebellion at the time, but that's how God saw it.

### **Jingle All The Way?**

For a long time I had been accepting jingle sessions which required me to sing, together with another 3 or 5 people, jingles for radio and television commercials. The money was extremely good

for these sessions and the work itself was very inspiring and challenging as I was always asked to sing the difficult harmonies. Unfortunately the work was very irregular and I wasn't always available when the jobs came up because of the ministry—we were often out of the country for months at a time on preaching and singing engagements so I wasn't reliable as far as the jingle company were concerned. The more I got involved with singing for God, the harder I found it to be convincing about commercial products. Not that I realised it at the time, I put every effort into it. But one day the director of the studio heard a track from one of my albums and said, "Why doesn't she sing the jingles like that?" !!! There's no answer to that is there? It just wasn't the same. I clung on to the sessions they offered me as I enjoyed doing them so much, but God allowed other people to fill my spots when I wasn't available who were more reliable than myself and then the jobs stopped coming my way altogether.

### **An Embarrassing Situation**

I vividly remember one time doing a recording session with the famous hairdresser Pierre Alexander. He wanted to record himself singing a love song to his lover for his forthcoming fashion show which was to be a very extravagant affair, and I was asked to sing opposite him.

Pierre didn't have a good voice, but he did have a very sensual Swiss accent, and being such an extrovert anyway he threw himself into his part of the song looking directly into my eyes. I sang my parts with as much conviction as I could muster, but I must confess I have never been so embarrassed in all my life. Pierre enjoyed my embarrassment and thought it very humorous to see me blush so he did his utmost to add to my confusion by ad-libbing sensual innuendoes which made me want to run. After the session was finished I tried my best to put on a bold front and make him think it was "all in a day's work", but I vowed to myself I would never allow myself be put into that situation again, and would sing songs for God. To sing with conviction the songs I feel convinced about.

### **A Dedicated Place**

At Barratt Ministries, which is also our home, we have a particular room which has been dedicated to God. At first this just seemed a nice thing to have, but it was only as time progressed that we actually understood for ourselves what this actually meant. Alex, who also lives at Barratt Ministries, used to take in violin pupils to earn a little money each week and would teach in God's room as this was where the piano was. But after a while we felt really convicted about this because the music being played and rehearsed had nothing to do with God at all, he was just conducting his business, so we had to stop the lessons being held there. It's not a place where people can sit for a cosy chat, either, that room has to be used for God whenever it is being utilised, for prayer, conferences, meetings, and such like.

## **A Peculiar People**

We are holy, if Christ is in us, and therefore should not yield any of our members to unholy practices because one day we will have to give an account to God for all we have done. God is still looking for a holy people, a royal nation, a peculiar people, so that they can be a testimony unto Him in this wicked world.