

Matthew 5:29-30; 18:7-9

## SEVERE SPIRITUAL SURGERY

- I. The radical command
- II. The eternal reason
- II. The spiritual power

## INTRODUCTION

To be true disciples of Lord requires 100% devotion to God & His Word & will.

- & it demands discipline & desire & determination to grow in faith & love to Jesus Christ.
  - a real seeking & striving to conquer & put away in our lives everything that hinders us from becoming completely committed & consecrated to Lord;
- we must then do what Phil.2 says: faithfully & fearfully work out the salvation in all our life that God has worked in us as He gives us both the willing & the power to do it.

Now such a discipline & dedication in growing more & more like Jesus involves, according to **Matt.5&18**, performing **SEVERE SURGERY**.

- a surgery to overcome sin's temptation, influence & power so we will fully & faithfully follow Lord
- as we look then at what these passages are saying, we notice **1<sup>st</sup> the radical command**, **2<sup>nd</sup> the eternal reason**, & **3<sup>rd</sup> the spiritual power**.

## I. THE RADICAL COMMAND

At 1<sup>st</sup> glance Christ's **RADICAL COMMAND** seems rather startling & surprising, doesn't it?

- that He demands removing the offending eye & hacking off the offending foot & hand.
- you know, there were a few Christians in the past, like the 3<sup>rd</sup> century church scholar, Origin of Alexandria, who actually took Jesus' words literally.
  - & they actually mutilated themselves in one form or another.
- & it was because of that the Council of Nicea in 325AD forbade such barbaric practices of self-mutilation.

Well, Jesus doesn't mean the physical removal of the eye or hand or feet to keep us from temptation & sin.

- that's because, if the right eye or foot or hand is taken away, a person can still sin with the left ones.
- & even if we got rid of them all we still sin with our mind's eye or inner thoughts & desires.
  - that's Jesus' point in Matt.5 when He says we sin by lusting after a woman.

You see, sin isn't just a matter of outward deeds done by physical hands or feet or even the eye, but it is of the heart that needs renewing.

- & the heart will never be cleansed of sin by plucking out a sinful, roving eye or cutting off a wicked, wayward arm or leg.
- that's like trying to clean water in a tank by just painting its outside.

Instead what we have here is “an example of our Lord's use of dramatic figures of speech.

- “What He was advocating,” JR Scott writes, “was not a literal physical self-maiming, but a ruthless moral self-denial. Not mutilation, but mortification is the path of holiness.
- “And 'mortification' or 'taking up the cross' to follow Christ means to reject sinful practices so resolutely that we die to them or put them to death.”

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Now we see that's the meaning of Jesus **RADICAL COMMAND** in the light of His teaching in **Matt.18**.

- for in vs.7 He tells us the world is full of temptations & occasions to sin which we can't get rid of.
  - & as long as we are in this life, they will continue to come.
- but, He says it is possible to prevent ourselves from being tempting & leading others into sin.
  - & in vs.8&9 that we can even overcome temptations in our own life.
- we can by performing constant, radical, serious, spiritual surgery on ourselves & in our lives.
  - all so that, by our lives, we don't tempt others to sin & ruin ourselves spiritually & eternally.

Th'fore Jesus uses the eye & hand & feet to teach us regarding the real & horrible nature of temptation & sin.

- to emphasize the terrible danger that can involve us.
  - to stress how very important it is to deal with & get rid of sin.
- & how important it is to live holy, godly lives before Lord.

And Jesus does that by using the symbols of the hand & feet & eye that lure & lead us into sin.

- to represent all those things that cause us to stumble into evil & error.
  - people, places, & practices that are enchanting enticements drawing us into wickedness & wrong.
- you see, all these can be captivating allurements that come through sight & sound, or through what we see & do, where we go, pulling us to follow filth & falsehood.

Notice too: with reference to these body parts, Jesus is talking about practical things even singling out in **Matt.5** the right eye & right hand.

- that's because for most of us the right eye & hand are more important than the left ones.

And so Jesus is saying if these things are tempting & causing us to sin,--

- or hindering real spiritual growth & keeping us from genuine & complete surrender to Christ,--
  - even if it is the most precious & valuable thing we have, or what is near & dear to us,--
- then all must go so we need to take decisive & drastic action to get rid of whatever in life is tempting or causing us to sin & is harming our Christian faith & life.
- we must never hesitate or pamper & play around with any temptations or sin.
  - but immediately we must take a radical treatment to put them to death.
  - & purify ourselves, for unclean hands & feet & eyes mean an unclean self, unfit to live with God eternally.

Now what Jesus is doing here is calling us, who follow Him, to daily repentance involving very serious, strict self-discipline with no sacrifice being too great.

- we must, so that we will be different, even as He stresses again & again in His Sermon on the Mt, when He says: “You have heard it said, but I say to you.”

- with that repeated phrase He is stating the way things were among the religious types of that day.
  - & He is emphasizing we, who believe & belong to Him, must have a lifestyle that is completely different with how the world thinks & acts.

Well then, when our Lord says in **Matt.5&8**: “If your hand, even your right hand, causes you to sin, cut it off & throw it away”, He is referring to any wrong doing.

- & the hand stands for the ability & things we do through which temptations can come & cause us to sin.
- for example, we may have great ability to make decisive decisions, to witness, to make music so that we know what to believe & what we must do & just forge ahead in doing it.

But these strength can become weakness causing us to sin.

- that's because they may be making us to become proud or cocky that we have little love & tolerance & sympathy for the views & opinions & ability of others.
- & the results are we aren't growing spiritually & living on the high plane of the Christian life in true & total trust & obedience, love & humility before Lord & others.

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Now Jesus says, if that's the case, then we must deal radically & quickly with these attitudes & actions that are standing in the way of spiritual growth & lowering our spiritual stature.

- we must cut off this hand of pride & discipline ourselves.
- we must, so that we learn to live more humbly in love to one another.
  - bear with other's weaknesses; seek & accept their views & advice & abilities.
  - & work hard to put others & their welfare 1<sup>st</sup> for Jesus' sake

Another example of the offending hand that can tempt us to sin is doing what others are doing today to get more & more possessions & pleasures & power & popularity & success.

- so we are hanging around with the wrong crowd, following their practice of drugs & drink & sex.
  - or we are involved in shady business schemes, dishonest deals for extra bucks.

- or we are not very faithful in church services or other church groups & functions because we are too busy doing other things for our own pleasure.
- again, Jesus says, if that's the case, then these hands must be cut off.
  - that is to say, we mustn't have these sinful practices, but behave as if we have actually cut off our hands & flung them away so that are now crippled.
  - & we can't then do any more of these things that cause us to sin.
  - & hinder us in growing more in complete commitment to Christ.

But now Jesus indicates another area of self-discipline when He says: "If your foot, even your right foot, causes you to sin, cut it off & throw it away."

- well, the foot refers to wrong going, to those habits or practices that we keep doing & to the places we go that are tempting us to sin & not grow in the Christian faith & life.
  - not just because they immoral or illegal, but because they are unchristian.
- for example: take the habit & practice of eating.
  - you see, ICor.6 says we must treat our bodies as the very house of God.

Th'fore what & how we eat are surely part of our living for Christ as Christians.

- it is, because it is His will that we love others & ourselves too.
- & so we must take good care of ourselves & not hurt ourselves by building "rubber tires" around our waists, for that isn't a life saver, but a life shortener.

And too, it must not be our practice & habit of always gorging ourselves with the biggest & best food while others starve with little or no food.

- if that's the case, we must cut off this foot of eating to the hurt of others & ourselves.
- we must "eat amounts big enough to make us fit, small enough to keep us from being fat."
- we must, so we will grow in the Christian life of love for Lord, for others, & for ourselves.

Another offending foot is the habitual practice & places we are addicted to like drinking.

- indeed alcohol, drunkenness & drinking are increasing & prevalent today,

even among Christians.

- & they are the cause of a lot of divorces, broken homes, & even suicides.
- many need drinks at meals, parties, wedding receptions, & other social gatherings.
- but because, as Christians, our whole, delicate, amazing mind & body belong to Lord, we are commanded to keep them holy & healthy.
  - & since it is proven that alcoholic indulgence causes physical, mental, spiritual harm, then a Christian isn't to be involved in this.
  - but we must cut off & get rid of this foot so we will be unable to go to those parties & places -3-where we are tempted to sin.
  - stop going & doing these things so we won't be impeded in our living for Jesus.

And the same is true concerning the habitual use of tobacco.

- if we are really Christians who want to grow in love for Lord & others, then we should seriously ask ourselves, as someone pointed out, these 4 questions about smoking:
  - 1) Can we justify it in view of its long-range threat to health & efficiency?
  - 2) Can we justify it in view of the needless, wasteful use of the money involved?
  - 3) Can we justify it in view of the untidiness & uncleanness of it?
  - 4) Can we justify it in view of the injurious effects upon our influence & witness as Christians.
- th'fore, since the foot of smoking is sin because it causes hurt to other & harm to ourselves, then it isn't too hard to realize what we must do as Christians, right?
  - that we can't do anything else but cut it off & cast it away from us.

Well, when Jesus says: "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out & throw it away", He is saying this is another area we must perform severe, spiritual surgery on.

- & this is the area of the desire & thoughts, for what we see can lead to wrong doing & wrong going.
- remember Eve: she sinned when she saw the forbidden fruit as good for food & desired the wisdom Satan said would come from eating the fruit.

Jesus also teaches that evil comes from the heart & desires when in **Matt.5** He talks

about disciplining the eye in connection with sexual desires of looking at a woman in lust.

- when we so look, He says, we have already sinned with her in our hearts.
- now be careful: Jesus isn't condemning physical practices & feeling, but “the absence of moral control over reaction. And it is disciplined handling of rising desires that marks a committed, cleansed, & conquering Christians.”

And so our Lord says, if our eye causes us to sin because we are tempted by what we see & think & desire,--

- then we must remove & throw it away.
- in other words, “Don't look! Behave as if you are blind & can't see anymore those things that causes you to sin.”

And no where is Jesus' teaching more true & so applicable than for our day & age.

- where the river of filth flows freely & rampant in many movies, magazines, & many lives.
  - & when we view pornographic material that causes unnatural, sexual stimulation & is so terrible corrupting & detrimental & disastrous for people.
- but 1<sup>st</sup> & foremost it is offensive to Christians because it degrades a person from being a human being into a sex object or play thing for one's own selfish gratification & gain.
  - & it is sin, for then we aren't treating a person in love as God commands.

Th'fore Jesus is saying, if our eye is causing us to sin by feasting on pornographic pictures or words & films, then surgery must be radical.

- we must gouge them out or don't look.
- & if our hands are handling such filth & our feet are taking us to such sinful places, then cut them off without dilly, dallying around.
  - we must destroy the evil magazine, burn the obscene book, stay away from the soul-destroying movie.
  - break off any social, intimate ties & deadly habits that can lead to wrong, wicked, sexual thoughts & feelings, desires & deeds.
- a true Christian must discipline herself & keep under control for Lord in such matters.

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But then what Jesus is really saying is we must guard ourselves from all approaches of sin.

- & it is a good military tactic to post a sentry to guard & defend against the enemy.
- & so also it makes good sense & even more so to post a moral guard so that we aren't tempted & caused to sin by what we see or think, do or go,

And that means, of course, we are going to be hurt & maimed.

- for it involves a radical surgery of cutting out of our hearts & lives all that can so easily become sources & means of temptations & causes for sin.
  - & that means setting our minds & mouths & manners only on that which is true, pure, holy, honest & just according to God's Word & will.
- & that will mean giving up somethings or persons or places we hold near & dear.
  - & we will be crippled socially, for we will be ridiculed & rejected by friends & family when we strive to be & live differently as Christ's followers.

Instead we will receive pressure & even persecution from those around us because it means going against today's principles & practices of permissiveness.

- for in disciplining & controlling ourselves to keep from what leads us into temptations & sin we go against the grain of modern society where almost anything goes.
- & it means, as Christians, our sense of right & wrong & sense of value & if what is really important is different than that of the world.
  - that what is right & eternally important is to obey what God says in Bible.
  - all so that we will be accepted by Christ rather than be like the world & accepted by the crowd.

## II. THE ETERNAL REASON

Now our **passage** also tells us there is a very, serious **ETERNAL REASON** we must discipline ourselves with such a severe, spiritual surgery to keep from sin & live only according to Lord' will.

- & that reason Jesus says it is better to be maimed in this life than to go into eternal hell whole.
- we see then He makes it very clear & certain in Matt.5&18 that cutting out sin & controlling our mind & body are a matter of where we will spend eternity.
- how jolting this is, “if not frightening to observe that what we tend to call



innocent (our thoughts & feelings & fantasies & looking) are actually seen by Lord as events that could put a person in danger of the fire of hell. The biblical view point regarding human conduct (is that) everything we do is of eternal significance. And willful violation of the commandment of God (even in our thoughts) is a violation of sufficient gravity that if not recognized & repented of, a person could be condemned forever.”

Th'fore, in light of what our Lord says in **Matt.18:6**, we must practice personal self discipline 1<sup>st</sup> of all for the sake of others & their eternal destiny.

- we must be careful not to lead anyone astray & to eternal death by sinful beliefs & behavior.

But, 2<sup>nd</sup>, we must also perform spiritual surgery to cut out all attitude & actions that are sinful & tempting to sin for our own sake.

- for Jesus is saying it is far better to eliminate certain experiences & enjoyments this life offers to experiences real exciting eternal life, than to enjoy a season of sin & finally enter eternal death.
- or it is a lot better to be poke fun of & be called an old fashion morally square.
  - & not be accepted because we refuse to read or watch or listen to or live today's sinful stuff, than to be accepted & risk final destruction in the world to come.

You see, there is only 1 alternative to discipline & self-control: eternal destruction.

- & so, no matter how precious or pleasurable or profitable things & lifestyles are we may have, they -5- must be sacrificed.
  - they must be if they are tempting & leading us into sin & away from God.
  - & dooming us for eternity.
- it's so true then, isn't it, that any sacrifice here on earth is worthwhile to insure our entrance into eternal glory with God.

Indeed, with theses impelling reasons having eternal ramifications, how can we Christians not seek & strive to remove any offending eye or ear or hand or foot?

- to not want to conquer & cast away all in our hearts & lives that can lead us into sin & stop our spiritual growth & bring us down to eternal hell itself?
- & not work hard to devote ourselves to true & total dedication to Jesus Christ

& His will?

## II. THE SPIRITUAL POWER

But now, we won't ever succeed doing this spiritual surgery by our own smarts & strength.

- we can only put to death any & all sin by God's presence & power.
- & so any necessary discipline is accomplished only by faith in Jesus Christ.
  - & being filled & controlled by the Holy Spirit.
  - & by constant prayer.
- for temptations & sin aren't “conquered by a clenched fist, but clinging by the hand of faith. There is not victory by flogging ourselves in trying harder, but trusting ourselves to the One who has already conquered on our behalf.”

## CONCLUSION

And we can be absolutely sure of that because that's what God promises in His Word.

- ICor.10:11 says: “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted He will also provide a way out so you can stand up under it.”
- & that way is Jesus because Rev.2:18 says: “He Himself suffered when He was tempted. He is able to help those who are being tempted.”
  - & when we ask Him Matt.7:7 says: “It will be given to you; seek & you will find; knock & the door will be opened to you.”

And then, when we do discipline ourselves by God's grace & power in Christ, **Jas.1:12** promises this:

- “Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.”

AMEN