

# If Your Right Eye Causes You To Stumble...

- A. Matthew 5:27-28.
1. I find myself citing this passage from the Sermon on the Mount frequently. It was part of our Bible reading back toward the end of July. It contains a powerful principle that we need.
  2. Because we are confronted every day with so many temptations to look with lust, we need regular reminders that Jesus has called us not just to be pure in our actions, but in our thoughts and motives as well.
  3. This passage helps us fight sexual immorality at the source. It targets the heart. And so we come back to this passage frequently.
- B. However, I find it interesting that we do not give as much attention to the next two verses, although they continue the thought from verses 27-28 (Matthew 5:29-30). How many times have you heard someone comment about these?
1. It's odd that we do not give them more attention, especially since they provide the solution for the problem introduced in the previous verses.
  2. Perhaps part of the problem is that we simply do not know what to do with Jesus' instruction. Does He literally want us to mutilate my body in order to avoid sin? Obviously that cannot be His point. First, it would not solve the problem. Even if you plucked out your right eye, you can still lust with the left. Pluck them both out and you can still harbor lust in your heart. Second, Jesus has already told us that the eye and the hand are not really the problem; it's the heart (v. 28).
- C. But if Jesus is not encouraging us to literally mutilate the body in our efforts to resist sin, what is He saying?
1. I will warn you that I do not believe answering this question will make us feel more comfortable with this text. In this passage Jesus shines the painful light of truth on sin. He exposes it for what it really is and describes the painful steps necessary to deal with it. This is a challenging text that speaks very frankly with us about what it will take to be victorious over the greatest threat we face.
  2. So, do you want to take a closer look? Do you really want to know how to win your battles with sin? To be victorious, we must learn the vital truths found in these four verses.

## Truth #1: Sin is serious business.

- A. We do not treat it that way. We are living in a time when people simply do not take sin seriously.
1. Just listen to the names we give to it.
    - a. People don't like to say that they lied and deceived people; they talk about telling "little white lies" or being a little "loose with the truth".
    - b. People don't like to say that they use obscene or profane language; they talk about using language that is a little colorful at times.
    - c. People don't talk about being addicted to pornography or lusting after inappropriate images on the internet; they like to say that they struggle sometimes with looking at things they shouldn't.
    - d. People don't talk about being a drunk; they prefer to say that they like having a good time.
    - e. People don't say they committed adultery; they prefer to say that they were guilty of a private indiscretion.
  2. If it's no big deal, then we certainly should not be punished for it – absolutely should not go to hell for it. I remember watching an episode of the Twilight Zone entitled, "Dead Run". It was a fictional account of a truck driver whose job it was to drive condemned souls to hell (yes, it's corny, but there is a point). As this episode developed, he discovered that many of the people being sent did not deserve to hell. One was a drug addict; another a homosexual. "Surely God would not send me to hell for that," the condemned souls complained. I think this reflects the mindset that is out there in our culture – sin is no big deal. It is certainly not something for which people should be sent to hell.
- B. The teaching of Jesus stands in sharp contrast to our culture's view of sin.
1. Keep in mind that the sin involved in this context is not murder. It's not even adultery (v. 28). This man hasn't said anything inappropriate. He has not yet taken any inappropriate action. He's just thought about it. Jesus said that he lusted for this woman in his heart. A lot of people would say, "What's the big deal?" In fact, a majority of Americans don't even believe this is wrong. But notice what Jesus says about it – listen to His language (v. 28); it's adultery of the heart! Lusting for another woman is no trivial matter to Jesus. This is serious business.
  2. But He's not done. After calling this "adultery of the heart" Jesus gives this warning (v. 29). Jesus talks about plucking out eyes because a heart filled with lust will condemn a man to hell. Some will complain that this is harsh and does not fit with the loving God we find in the Bible. But this is our problem –we have not truly come to know the God of the Bible. Yes, He is a loving God. But He is also a just and righteous God who sees sin in a much different way than people in our culture (Hebrews 10:26-31).
  3. Jesus has a different view of sin.
    - a. To Jesus, it is not "colorful speech," it is "unwholesome" (literally, rotten) speech (Ephesians 4:29).
    - b. To Jesus, it is not being "loose with the truth", it is lying (Colossians 3:9).
    - c. To Jesus, it is not "having a good time," it is drunkenness (I Corinthians 6:9-10).
    - d. To Jesus, it's not simply an "alternative lifestyle," it is the sin of homosexuality (I Corinthians 6:9-10).
    - e. These are sins that will cause us to lose our souls (I Corinthians 6:10).
  4. If we want to avoid that fate, then we have to start seeing sin the way Jesus did. It's a big deal.

**Truth #2: Dealing With Sin Requires Radical Action.**

- A. Let me just begin by saying that this second point is simply the natural outcome of the first.
1. If sin is serious business – if it is our eternal destiny, heaven and hell that hangs in the balance, then this point naturally follows. We should do whatever it takes to rid our lives of this terrible plague.
  2. People make this choice with their physical bodies every day. I knew a guy back in Florida who allowed doctors to cut off his foot and handicap him for the rest of his life. Why would a man ever do that? He had a terrible infection in that foot and if they had not removed it, he would have died. He did not want to part with his foot and deal with the limitations that came with that choice. But even more important, this man did not want to die. In light of what was at stake, he agreed to take radical action to rid his body of his infection.
- B. This is exactly the point Jesus is trying to make about sin in our text (Matthew 5:29-30).
1. His point is not that we should physically mutilate the body, because this will not help us avoid sin. The man who plucks out his right eye can still lust with his left.
  2. What He is saying is that we must take whatever actions are necessary to rid our souls of this terrible disease called sin. What He is saying is that sometimes drastic actions must be taken. We need to recognize and accept that moral purity at times will call for ruthless acts of self-denial. Let's make this really simple: I have to do whatever it takes to keep sin out of my life.
  3. This is an easy principle to agree with; it's a tough principle to live.
- C. We need to get this down to where we live, so hang on...
1. To rid my life of sin, I may have to cut some friends out of my life.
    - a. I may have an old friend (or group of friends) who is not a Christian. When I'm with them, I find it hard to serve God. They always seem to be luring me back into sinful things that I left behind when I decided to follow Jesus (filthy talk, bars and drinking). The Bible warns us about this (1 Corinthians 15:33). What I need to do is cut those friends out of my life.
    - b. Some will complain, "That isn't fair. I've been friends with this person my whole life. I shouldn't have to give that up." But that's not what Jesus said in this passage. We should do whatever we must to rid our lives from sin. If I have some friends in my life who keep me from doing that, they need to go. Better to lose them than to lose my soul.
  2. To rid my life of sin, I may need to cut off my cable TV or get rid of my computer.
    - a. There are many appropriate uses of televisions and computers. But we also understand that there are a lot of ways to get caught up in sin and corrupt our minds with the material we can access through the cable or the internet. One of the most obvious is the sin Jesus discusses in this passage. There is plenty of material that can lead a man to lust after a woman and commit adultery in his heart.
    - b. The problem is that a lot of people – and a lot of Christians – who give themselves over to this sin and have a hard time letting go of it. It is a pervasive problem. 70% of men between the ages of 18-24 viewed a pornographic website in the last month. 66% of men in their 20s and 30s count themselves as regular users of pornography. But the largest consumers are teenagers. It is a problem complicated by easy access (almost everyone has a computer; most kids have their own in their room) and the perception of privacy.
    - c. I realize that there are lots of steps that can be taken to address this problem, other than cutting off the cable or getting rid of the computer. We can put the computer in a public place in our house and place limits on when it can be used (by all of us). We can monitor each other's usage and hold each other accountable. We can have an accountability partner check up on us.
    - d. But at the end of the day, we've got to deal with this problem! If these other steps are not working, then I have to do whatever it takes to rid my life of this sin. Do you agree? If it comes to it, I may need to cut off the cable, give up my private home office, or give up my laptop – if that's what it takes!
  3. To rid my life of sin, I may need to give up my job.
    - a. This is a tough one. People will almost immediately object that we cannot give up our jobs because we have to provide for our families. However, we cannot sacrifice our souls to do that.
    - b. I may be working for a boss who pressures me to be dishonest. Either I stand up to that and refuse, or I must find other work.
    - c. I may have a boss who makes unreasonable demands on my time and causes me to neglect important obligations to my family and my God. Either I stand up to that and refuse, or I must find other work.
    - d. I may be working with someone who puts my faithfulness to my spouse at risk. Either I find a way to stop that, or find other work.
    - e. No job is so good or lucrative that keeping it is worth losing my soul.

**Conclusion: We must learn to see sin as Jesus did.**

It is not a trivial matter. Nothing less than eternity in heaven or hell that is at stake with the choices we make. Consequently, whatever it takes, I have to deal with sin. I have to rid my life of this terrible spiritual disease, even if it requires radical action. It would not just be the teaching of Jesus that would demonstrate the horror of sin. Ultimately, it was His death on the cross – the necessary sacrifice to save men from sin – that demonstrated how horrible sin truly is. But Jesus willing made this sacrifice to rescue us from sin. He wants to rescue you right now. If you still bear the guilt of your sins, you are facing the greatest crisis to confront mankind. You need to deal with this crisis right now!

- David A. Banning