

Journeying through the scriptures in our Daily Bible Reading at Prevailing Word Church, we have come across some surprising, if not troubling, passages. From time to time, we are going to attempt to answer some of the questions that might arise from these verses. God bless you as you pursue a deeper understanding of God's Word.

Psst. Did He just say to pluck your eye out and cut off your hand and foot?

In Matthew 5, Jesus is teaching the "Sermon on the Mount" and addresses the issues of uncontrolled anger, unresolved offense, adultery and others. In the middle of His statements (vs. 29-30), Jesus instructs His listeners to pluck out their "right eye" if it offends them and to cut off their "right hand" if it offends them. He then says it's better to lose one member rather than lose their whole body to hell because of the sin they could not overcome (thanks to the offending eye and hand). In Mark 9:43-48, Jesus makes similar statements to His disciples regarding the seriousness of causing a "little one" who believes in Him to stumble. (He had just taken a child in His arms minutes before, so it appears "little ones" refers to children.) Again, He instructs His disciples to get rid of the offending eye, hand or foot.

Most of us can easily recognize that Jesus is illustrating the seriousness of these sins, and all sin, by directing His audiences to do whatever it takes to not sin – He uses an extreme illustration that is not to be taken literally to make His point. Here are some thoughts to support that viewpoint –

1. As far as we can tell by the reading, no one was alarmed at His statements – perhaps the audience was familiar with these sayings.
2. It is common even today to use "heart" for feelings, "my right hand" for a faithful co-worker or companion, "brain" for someone who excels academically or has good common sense, and so forth. This usage of body parts to represent a concept, person or idea is found throughout the Bible. For example, I Corinthians 12 compares the followers of Jesus, the church, to the parts of a physical body.

In Matthew 24:51 we read about the evil servant being "cut in two" and assigned his portion with the hypocrites where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It's not possible for a person who has been physically cut in two to weep or gnash teeth! So, like the statements in Matthew 5 and Mark 9, we have to look

deeper to discover the details of Jesus' teaching. In all of these scripture passages, the real source of the sin problem is the human soul, or spirit, that has not been surrendered to God and His word. When speaking about adultery in Matthew 5, Jesus uses a common body part, the heart, to illustrate this concept of our inner being. So, we consider plucking out the right eye and cutting off the right foot to represent a non-physical concept as well, such as eliminating anything of special value, of power, or of great benefit that causes us to sin. It could mean to take our eyes (even our "good" eye) off of the things or people we keep looking at that are tempting us to sin. It could mean that we don't allow ourselves to walk anywhere near those places that are sources of stumbling – acting as though we just can't because we don't have feet, not even 1 "good" foot, that will take us there!

In conclusion, the important take-away here is that Jesus is not softening the impact of sin and its consequences on our eternal destination as well as on the lives and possibly eternal destinations of those we influence. We have a very heavy responsibility to do our part to make sure we are not stumbling or causing anyone else to stumble!