

Mark 9:43-50 Cut It Off

Read in Mark 9:43-48 the incredible statement Jesus made. (Note, verses 44 and 46 are not included in the NIV or in most newer translations. They are not found in most ancient texts and where included are simply a repeat of verse 48.

“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.” “If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off.” “If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out.” Few things that Jesus said seem more out of place than this. He has been talking about serving one another and encouraging new Christians in their faith and then, seemingly out of nowhere, He said, *“if necessary to keep from continuing in sin, dismember your body.”* Note the connection between Jesus saying not to cause a new Christian to stumble and not stumbling ourselves. We not only need to be careful how our lives impact others, but we have to be careful how our life impacts our walk with God. The Greek word for stumble is similar to our English word “scandal.” We describe sin with lots of nicer sounding words like “just a mistake” or a “bad choice” but God calls sin scandalous.

Note that Jesus was not suggesting that one literally cut off part of one’s body. There is recorded in church history that some of the early leaders took that literally, but it did not take the church long to recognize that Jesus was talking figuratively here. In the Old Testament we read in Leviticus 19:28 that disfiguring the body was a serious sin in God’s eye.

But here’s a thought. If you took this literally how long would it be before you lost both hands, both feet and both eyes? Realizing just how sinful we really are should cause us to consider how gracious and forgiving our loving Lord is and to re-commit ourselves to seeking, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live more like He would have us live.

What was Jesus saying to His disciples? He said that if as a Christian we do not deal seriously with sin in our own lives we cannot hope to be a challenge to others or become all we were redeemed to be.

In this challenge, Jesus is telling us that sin impacts every area of our lives. Our **hands** represent what we do, our **feet** represent where we go, and our **eyes** represent what we see. May I suggest that if Jesus were physically here today and teaching us He, would undoubtedly add the **ears**, given the fact that our society, with all our electronic gadgets, seems to always have something playing, at least in the background.

Before looking at each of them we should note a couple of things. First, Jesus said, **“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.”** This is a very personal issue and calls on us to judge ourselves. Jesus is asking each of us to personally evaluate our life and see what it is in our life that is hindering us in any way from becoming all God wants us to become. What in our individual life is causing us to be less than fully faithful to God? Is there something that is preventing me from having the fullness of the walk with God that He wants to have with me?

Not only is it personal in terms of what is causing each of us to stumble, it is also the personal responsibility of each of us to deal with it. Jesus did not say, “If someone tells you that you have a sin problem, ask them to cut it off.” Ultimately, we are responsible for what we do. Hands do not operate on their own. Feet do not decide on their own to take a walk. Because we make choices we must be willing to do whatever it takes to step away from sin, even if that means radical surgery. No one else can do it for us, which is why in the end we cannot legislate morality. Morality is always a personal choice. We can legislate punishment for sin but cannot force people to live properly.

The major reason we have to act on our behavior is that behavior ultimately stems from within. Read Mark 7:20-21 to see what Jesus said about the source of our behavior.

In the Greek the verbs are in the present tense. The present tense was used not simply to describe what was taking place at this moment, but it described an ongoing event. When those to whom this Gospel was sent first read it they understood Jesus to be saying, “*If your hand causes you to stumble over and over again*” or “*If your foot is causing you to continually stumble.*” The struggle against temptation is a continual one. Some of those temptations seem to always be present, so over and over we have to say “No”.

“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.” Jesus told His disciples that if something in their lives was causing them to stumble in sin it had to go regardless of the cost.

It is no fun losing a limb, but there are times when a surgeon tells us that living without a limb is the only way to save a life and we opt for that. Jesus was telling His disciples that sin is so serious that it must be cut out regardless of the cost. Living without something is far better than living with the effects of known, habitual sin in our lives.

The challenge is to examine our hands to evaluate the things we are doing to be sure we are not doing that which displeases God. We need to examine our feet to be sure they are not taking us places where Jesus cannot go with us. We must evaluate our eyes to be sure that what we are seeing is what should be seen by God’s people. And, incidentally, while the emphasis here is on things that must go we have to realize that when the hands stop doing that which is sinful, they have to, in turn, begin to do that which is good. When our feet stop going where they have no right to take us, they have to take us somewhere proper. When our eyes stop looking at images they should never see they have to start looking at that which is pleasing to the Lord.

What about the hands? This afternoon stare at your hands for a few minutes and think about how you use them. Many in our society use their hands to steal, to abuse, to touch that which they have no right to touch. Many use their hands to hold tightly that which they should not even have. The quote in the bulletin today by Corrie ten Boom says a lot. What sites have your hands typed into the computer this week that resulted in your eyes seeing what they should not have been looking at? Have you used your fingers to text messages that should never have been written, let alone sent? How can we better use our hands to serve our Lord? Have your hands been the hands of Jesus this week, helping those He loves?

Stare a bit at your feet. Where have they taken you this week? Obviously, they have taken us lots of places we needed to go, but have they taken you places you should not have been, to activities you should not have been a part of? As the alternative, have they taken you places where you can be the feet of Jesus serving those in need or sharing the gospel with those who need a walk with Him?

How about the eyes? The only way you can see your eyes is to stare at them in a mirror but think about what they have seen. In some ways the eyes may be the hardest to control but they can at least be restricted. We can turn the channel off, we can put the magazine down, we can look away instead of lusting. Have we used our eyes this week to covet something that God has not given us. Our eyes can be used to see and enjoy the beauty of God's creation, to read His Word, to see people in need and pray for them.

Jesus was concerned that His disciples understand that following Him required a serious commitment to be different from the world around us. Sinners, at least for now, can go where they want, do what they want to do, see what they want to see. Discipleship calls on us to commit our total self to the Lord, doing what He wants us to do, going where He wants us to go, and seeing those things He wants us to see. When we find ourselves using the senses God has given us for anything improper we are to find a way to cut that activity out of our life. Are we willing to do that, even if it takes radical surgery on the way we have been living? Breaking habits can be difficult and even painful, but in the end, it will be worth the temporary sense of loss as God teaches us new ways to use and enjoy the life He has given us.