

Mark 9; 43-48; “Spiritual Self-Surgery”, Sermon # 79 in the series – “Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 9th, 2010, in the Morning Worship Service.

The verses which I have just read to you are no doubt painful to your ears. They describe for us the most dreadful thing that can possibly be imagined; the consequences and judgment of a person’s being cast into hell; that place of everlasting torment. Jesus is saying that every person, those who were listening to Him then, and those who are listening to this sermon now, must do everything in their power to avoid going to hell. He is telling us that being cast into hell will most certainly happen to the person who refuses to deal decisively with their sins; especially with their besetting sins, those sinful habits of soul and body that want to continue on in us, working death in us, after we come to Christ. A true Christian must, and they will by the grace of Christ, deal with these sinful habits. Jesus is saying that it is possible to fool yourself about whether you are a true Christian. I believe that He is telling us that we, as believers, must be ready and willing to become spiritual surgeons; ready to perform spiritual self-surgical operations upon our own heart, and our own body, when we realize that habits of sin are continuing on in our lives. Let me ask you if you see yourself as a spiritual surgeon this morning? I know that to become a skillful spiritual surgeon, you will need Jesus’ instruction explained to you. So what I want to do this morning is to open up this subject by asking 4 questions. 1st – What is the context of Jesus’ giving us this instruction? 2nd – What do the hand, the foot, and the eye represent in this instruction? 3rd – What are the awful consequences for the person who does not take this action and heed this instruction? And 4th – What are the happy results for the person who does take these actions that Jesus is giving?

1st of all – What is the Context of Jesus’ giving us this instruction?

This subject is related to what has gone before in this chapter, starting in verse 30. Jesus had told his disciples in verse 31 that He was going to be betrayed; that He would be killed, and that He would rise again on the 3rd day. But on the way to Capernaum, where they were staying that night, Jesus knew that instead of their thinking about the implications of these awful and amazing things that He had told them that He would accomplish, instead they had been disputing among themselves on the road, about who would be the greatest. How much the followers of the Lord Jesus would have to learn, about their own hearts, both then and now. Jesus knew, at that very time, that these sinful and selfish thoughts, about who was the greatest among them, would lead one of His disciples to betray him, another to deny him, and the rest to flee when the Temple guard came to arrest Him. They would be perfectly unfit to be His followers, His disciples, and His apostles, if this kind of thinking was not repented of.

This led Jesus to confront them, beginning in verse 35, with the principles of what it meant to be a part of His kingdom. It would mean their humbly receiving little children and other disciples who did not follow with them. (verses 36-41) It would mean conducting themselves in such a humble and righteous way that the focus of their lives and ministry would be upon serving and helping other people to come to Christ. He was teaching them how to lead a righteous life. And He was saying that in order for them to do that, that they would need to put to death those thoughts of pride, in their mind and heart. These thoughts would not only disqualify them for ministry; but if they held on to these thoughts, and continued to develop them, it would greatly affect their entering into eternal life at all. Where is the reward for a Christian man who is proud; who is always thinking that he is great, and who desires more greatness? I believe that that person; if he is a true Christian, will find himself to be last and least in terms of his reward in the kingdom of God, if he does not repent of it altogether.

And certainly it is one of the worst possible things that any person can do, to cause the “little ones” who believe in Jesus to stumble. To cause them to stumble is to cause them to fall into sin. And Jesus says in verse 42 that “it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown in to the sea.” Those “young ones” in the faith are caused to fall into sin when someone is setting a bad example before them. The unfortunate lesson that is taught by a proud man, a person who is seeking his own greatness, is that proud people are to be looked up to, and they are to be followed, in doing things which promote a person’s own greatness, strength, or cleverness. The humble way of faith and love, in obedience to the truth of the word of God, is not going to be seen in that man. And it is not going to be learned by those who follow him. On the other hand, Jesus says, the littlest kindness done to children and to those who belong to Christ, a kindness done in the name of Jesus, will not fail to receive a reward. Now what Jesus goes on to talk about, from here to the end of the chapter, is the absolute necessity in the life of the believer, of their cutting off besetting sins in order to enter in to eternal life; in order to enter in to the eternal kingdom of God, when you die.

Do not think for a moment that I am propounding a doctrine of salvation by works. It is not so. Salvation is by grace through faith, and it is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God; lest any person should boast. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the One, and the only One, who has merited that salvation for us. It is when we believe in His finished work of righteousness in fulfilling the law, and in what He has done for us in offering Himself up as a sacrifice in our place at the cross; that is the point in time when we are saved. But these verses that we are studying this morning teach us that it is possible for a person to fool themselves in relation to their own evaluation of themselves as a Christian. “If your hand causes you to sin cut it off.” Jesus is saying here, that in the lives of many people who profess to be His disciples; there may be habits of sin that must be dealt with, or they will perish. He is saying that when you trust in Him, that He will give you grace to become a spiritual surgeon and cut out and cut off diseased spiritual limbs. Hebrews 12: 1 – “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

2nd – What do the hand, the foot, and the eye represent in this instruction?

The foot, the hand, and eye are those members of the physical body which remaining sin in a believer may use. They represent what you might still be doing as a habit in sin which you have not decisively dealt with, because you have not previously seen it for what it is, and the consequences which it will bring if you do not cut off its practice. Since you use these members extensively in your activities every day, they are very precious to you. You would be very reluctant to part with any of these members. But spiritually speaking, the habits of sin may be very active in your affections and thoughts, and not be seen or perceived by others. And so the sinful habit continues. Jesus is saying that you must, where it is necessary, cut off hand, eye, or foot in repentance and mortification of those members which cause you to sin. If you procrastinate, you may be being deceived by the deceitfulness of sin. A lust resides in your heart and you are finding some way to rationalize it to yourself. Perhaps you have even become very good at hiding it from others.

Now I would like us to look at a few verses to confirm what is being asserted here. Turn with me to the book of Hebrews Chapter 3, verse 12. “Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” “For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.” You will notice that the Apostle addresses those to whom he is writing as brethren. He is saying that sin, that is, the remaining corruption in the heart of a believer, is very deceitful. It may trick a person so far, that they will allow themselves to depart from the Living God. “Oh,” you say, “I

would never do that.” “How could that possibly happen?” It may indeed happen if you do not build yourself up in your most holy faith. If you have not seen your need of Christ helping you to put all sin to death when you find it in your heart you are in a very dangerous position, spiritually speaking.

It may begin by your heart deceiving you into thinking that it is alright for you to tolerate a certain amount of sin, or a certain kind of sin in your heart and life. After all, you may think to yourself, I do not want to be seen as overly righteous. But what is this but unbelief, working in your heart? To really be overly righteous is to be trying to impress others with the spiritual and outwardly righteous things that you do. It often means that there is no spiritual life and substance behind all of that display, in your heart. You are careful in your words and behavior when you are around other people; you do everything that people in your church expect you to do. But you do not believe that God is concerned with where your heart goes; what your heart does, all the rest of the time. But ultimately God is most concerned with the heart and what it does and where it goes. “Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4: 23) There are ways of thinking and acting that a person might make excuses for; and tolerate all their lives.

A true disciple of Christ will deal with these besetting sins, and heart driftings, and will cut them off. It is not an unbeliever who has the power to cut off what is causing them to sin in their hearts and in their actions. It is only the one who has really come to know the Lord Jesus. And Jesus is saying that if these things are not cut off, it will prove that that person never was ever born again by the Spirit of God. They do not have the power and grace to repent of all their sins. They will, at the last, prove themselves to be hypocrites, and they will end up going to hell. Perhaps they wanted to be saved from hell; but they did not want to be saved from sin. And instead of entering in to eternal life when they die; they will be cast into hell instead, because they did not think it important to deal with their sins after their supposed conversion. Often a person in this condition does not see how terrible a thing sin is in the sight of God, or what it will lead them to; it's being allowed to reside there in their heart.

But turn over with me to Mark Chapter 7 and we will attempt to sort out what the hand, the foot, and the eye in our text represent. In Mark 7, verse 21, Jesus says, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.” “All these things come from within and defile a man.” All of these sins begin in the heart, and sometimes they stay there in hiding from the eye of others; sometimes breaking out to dishonor God and to hurt other people. The hand, in our text in Mark, is the word-picture which represents the sins of adultery and fornication in the touch. It represents the murder in the hand that strikes or holds the weapon, thefts in the hand that steals, covetousness in the hand that grasps and wants more, wickedness, in the hand that is cruel or unloving, deceit in the hand which holds a falsehood in it. (Psalm 144: 8, 11) Lewdness is the hand that wants to uncover what should be concealed. And the evil eye is the hand that wants to rule others, but not be ruled by God or truth. The evil eye is the eye that is suspicious of those who would have the position which it covets or wants to hold; or hold on to. (1 Samuel 18: 9) Blasphemy is the hand which slaps the face of God; pride is the hand which would lift ourselves up over others. And foolishness is the hand which throws off what is appropriate and right.

The foot, in this same way of looking at these sins, is that which presumes to trespass; to just go far enough over the line of transgressing God's commandments, that it can obtain what it is looking for. The foot is that which will take the sinning believer where they think that they want to go. Perhaps they are drawn to go, against their better nature; if they are not on their guard. Proverbs Chapter 1, verse 10 says: “My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.” “If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait to shed blood; let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause;

let us swallow them alive like Sheol, and whole like those who go down to the Pit; we shall find all kinds of precious possessions, we shall fill our houses with spoil; cast in your lot among us, let us all have one purse'—My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.” Often a person’s feet have to go somewhere in order to do the evil that their heart is meditating upon, or drawn to. It is when we do not keep our spiritual feet upon the good paths of the Lord, in our walk with Him spiritually, that we then will find trouble and sorrow in the sin which we thought would bring us pleasure or power or greatness in the eyes of men.

Proverbs 3: 21 – “My son, let them not depart from your eyes—keep sound wisdom and discretion; so they will be life to your soul and grace to your neck.” “Then you will walk safely in your way, and your foot will not stumble.” “When you lie down, you will not be afraid; yes, you will lie down and your sleep will be sweet.” “Do not be afraid of sudden terror, nor of trouble from the wicked when it comes; for the Lord will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught.” And what about the eye; what does the eye represent? It represents what the heart or what the physical eyes look at. The sinful heart, or what the Bible calls our flesh, directs the physical eye toward what it wants to see. In Galatians chapter 5, verse 17, it says: “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” If you turn with me over to Matthew 6: 22, you will see that the eye represents spiritual discernment. “The lamp of the body is the eye.” “If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.” “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness!” The context here is related to holding to God or to money as your Master. Verse 24 says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.” “You cannot served God and mammon.”

The words of Christ on the lamp in relation to this, mean that if the spiritual eye of your heart is good that you will not serve money, but your whole body (all the things that you pursue with your mind and your body to obtain money and your use of money, will be done in a way that honors God. You will be generous and not stingy. You will pluck out the eye of covetousness and greed. You will cut off the hand that refuses to give your money in the service of God and the building of Christ’s Church, and the forwarding of His kingdom. You will not always be spending your money building your own kingdom. Your eye will not cause you to stumble, or sin in this regard, because you are seeing things from the Biblical perspective of seeing all that you have, coming to you from God’s hand, and not from your own efforts and business savvy. You will pluck out the evil eye of covetousness. The same principle could apply to all the other sins that we have mentioned in the list before.

Now let us ask ourselves: What then, are we instructed to do if we find that our hand, our foot, or our eye is causing us to sin? The straightforward answer of Jesus is that we cut it off. He does not mean that we cut off the physical members of our body when we sin. He means that we would cut off the source of the sins which has been leading the members of our body to go along with those motions of sin within our hearts. Turn with me to Colossians Chapter 3, verse 1. “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.” “Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.” “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” “When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” Putting to death your members is the same thought as Jesus’ saying, “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.” The obvious application for all of us here is this: Are you engaged in this holy surgery? I hope that you see, from the verses that I just read to you, that it will take much of the power and the grace of Christ in order to “put to death your members which are on the earth”.

Turn with me over to Romans Chapter 8, verse 10, and you will see how you will be able to do this surgery. “And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit (spirit) is life because of righteousness.” “But If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.” “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not the flesh, to live according to the flesh.” “For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Notice the great power of the Holy Spirit to help us. He is given to us as believers in Christ, to “put to death the deeds of the body.” The Spirit is life to us because of Christ’s righteousness.

To have Christ’s life is to have the power to overcome and to put to death sins of every sort. He gives us the power to cut off the hand, the foot, and the eye of sin. In trusting in Christ we no longer owe the flesh anything. We do not owe the habits of sin anything. We have the power to break them and to cut them off, and to forsake them. This is what Christ calls you to do as a Christian. The application is simple. Are you engaged in holy surgery to cut off the lusts of the flesh, the boastful pride of life, and the lust of the eyes? Ah, my dear friends; if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if “by the Spirit” you are doing holy surgery, you shall indeed live forever! And this leads us on to our 3rd point.

3rd – What are the awful consequences for the person who does not heed this instruction?

Three times it is mentioned here, lest anyone should miss it. That person who does not deal with their besetting sins in spiritual surgery will end up going to hell, “into the fire that shall never be quenched—where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.” There is nothing so horrible to think of in this life; as to think of what will happen to those go to that awful place. What will happen to me, if I go to that dreadful place? It is a place; a place created by God for those who will not, and who do not repent of their sins. Those in hell never really changed their mind about their sin. They allowed themselves to justify some particular sin or sins. And they have now come to the place where they will perish as a result of it. Do not be fooled; if Christ mentions something 3 times in a row, using the same words each time, as He does nowhere else in all of the gospels, then it must be of the greatest possible importance that you and I receive His warning and act upon it.

When a person goes to hell, they do not want to go there; they are forced to go there. They are cast into hell. The angels of God will usher them into that awful place. There will be no turning back; and no second chances. Those who go there will think about the choices that they made for sin; to hold on to it; and they will think about those choices for all eternity, feeling the deepest anguish. They will deeply regret them then, but they will have no way to go back and undo the damage that they have done to themselves. They did not ask for God’s mercy. They did not want to receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. They will curse themselves a billion times a billion times over, that they did not really receive Christ or pray to receive His power which would have helped them to cut off their sins. In this, they have dishonored God; they have spurned His gospel offers of the forgiveness of sins, and they did not pray for the grace which would have allowed them to cut off their hand, foot, and eye sins. And so, God must punish them forever.

You ask me why forever? Because the implications of sin, in God’s government of the Universe, go on forever. Whatever sins that people have committed and have not repented of, they stand as a provocation to God’s goodness and His perfect sense of justice. He must punish sin. It is the antithesis of His perfect and holy Being. He created us in His own image and likeness, and a part of that image is, that we are eternal beings. When you sin against a God who has an eternal purpose for your life; and you refuse to deal with your sins, then God must punish you forever. He is eternal; He created you to live forever with Him; but you would not have it on

His terms; and so you must be punished forever. The fire that the unrepentant sinner will be cast into, will never be quenched. It will never die down, nor will it ever be put out. Eternal flames are the place where “the worm does not die.” The worm mentioned here is a word picture, I believe, of two things. It is a picture of the resurrected body of the sinner which will be made to crawl through eternity bearing the wrath of God. The resurrection body of the person who is damned will come forth in all of its sins. And it will be designed by God to feel all of those sins proportionate to the degree which that person sinned. Some will have greater punishment than others. Some will have committed heinous sins and receive the lowest place in hell. Others will have been somewhat moral and proud people who thought that they needed no repentance. They will not do much better. All in hell will feel themselves to be worms in their own sight, in terms of their body, which will be tormented forever.

This worm will not die so as to be annihilated; but that person; body and soul now re-united, will experience something else besides bodily torments forever. That person will also experience the torments of their conscience which gnaw upon their thoughts and their feelings. Things could have been different. This is my fault; not God’s; it is all my fault that I am here. I deserve this punishment; I will have to bear it; but I cannot bear it. I think about my sins, but my conscience only continually accuses and condemns me. That soul will be forced to bear the terrible torments of anger against themselves and regret; remorse and anguish; weeping and gnashing of teeth. Still God’s hand will be stretched out against them for all the ages of eternity. Still the back will be bent forever laboring to find rest and it shall not come. Those ages of eternity will roll on and on and on, and yet no relief, no happiness, no peace, no sense of blessing or goodness shall ever be experienced by them, ever again. This is why you find an all-important statement made and the question asked in Isaiah 28: 14 – “The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: ‘Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire?’ ‘Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?’” The answer comes to us: Now one can. Will you not search your heart now, and pray the prayer of Psalm 139: 23? “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting?” And this leads me to close this message with this question.

4th – What are the happy results for the person who does take this action that Jesus is giving instruction about?

Jesus uses these blessed words 3 times right up alongside the warnings about going to hell. He says, “It is better to enter in to life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell.” It is better for you to enter in to life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell.” “It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast in to hell fire....” If you have held on to your besetting sins, you will continue to have the use of your two hands, your two feet, and your two eyes in continuing in sin. But should you continue in sin that grace might abound? God forbid. You will perish in your sins. But if you cut off the hand, the foot, and the eye, which have pursued sin, you shall not perish in your sins, but you will enter in to life eternal. O, glorious thought! You will most certainly and definitely enter the eternal kingdom of God and Christ. You shall most certainly be happy and joyful forever. You shall rejoice and triumph over the World, your flesh and the Devil. How happy and joyful will the maimed person be then; the person who cut off their hand, their foot, and plucked out their eye. Sin no longer has dominion over them. Now the person who has obeyed Jesus’ instructions here in this passage, no longer presents their members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin. Instead they present themselves to God as their being alive from the dead, and all their members as instruments of righteousness. Christ has given them the victory. The Lion of Judah shall break every chain; and give us the victory again and again; all the way to the gates of the Celestial City, and all the way into the New Heavens and New Earth wherein dwells righteousness; all the way into the arms of your Savior; your Lord Jesus Christ.

