

# ST. SIMEON ANGLICAN CHURCH, OFF FUTA ROAD, AKURE

## BIBLE STUDY, 03/09/2008

### STUDY 16

## PRIORITY OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

Matthew 5:29 – 30

Most men could claim that they had not committed the sin of adultery but very few could honestly say that they had not committed the sin of lusting, which could easily turn into adultery. In this study, our Saviour furnishes heavenly instruction for avoiding the adultery of heart. Just as the seventh commandment not only prohibited the physical act of adultery, but also all mental impurity, so the sixth commandment not only forbade the taking of life, but also reprehended any deliberate maiming of either our own body or that of our neighbour. Self-mutilation of body parts in the removal of eyes or hands will not cure sin and lustful desires which reside in the will. The plucking out of the eye or cutting off of the hand if they are instruments that precipitate adultery in viewing or taking what does not belong to us, emphasises the priority of spiritual renewal wherein we allow for repentance and the cutting off of sin from our hearts in order to allow God's purity and faithfulness to be activated in our behaviour. If we crucify not the flesh with its affections and lusts, the mere plucking out of an eye or the cutting off of a hand will profit the soul nothing. The root of sin lies much deeper than the physical: "cleanse first that which is *within* the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also" (Matthew 23:26). Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good (Matthew 12:33).

### 1. The priority of spiritual renewal

Matthew 5:28–30; 18:8–9; Mark 9:43–48; Zechariah 11:17; Exodus 29:20; Romans 7:23; 6:13; Mark 7:21–23; II Peter 2:14;

Heart-adultery, adulterous thoughts and dispositions, which never proceed to the act of adultery or fornication defiles the soul. *Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her in his heart.* Such looks and dalliances are so very dangerous and destructive to the soul, that it is better to lose the eye and the hand that thus offend than to give way to the sin, and perish eternally in it. *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.* *Offend thee*, the noun from which the verb "offend," in the original, is derived, commonly means a stumbling-block, or a stone placed in the way, over which one might fall or ensnared. It means to cause to fall into sin.

*And if thy right eye*, the organ of reception, *causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee.* These words indicate decision and determination, and suggest the conduct of a surgeon who, to protect the rest of the body, unflinchingly severs the gangrened members. *And if thy right hand*, the instrument of outward action, *causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee.* Jesus here emphasises the earnestness with which men should seek a sinless life. The right eye and hand and foot were regarded as the most precious, but it is better to lose the dearest thing in life than to lose one's self; to be deprived of all earthly advantage than to be cast into hell. The right eye and the right hand are used here to point out those sins which appear most pleasing and profitable to us; from which we must be separated, if we desire ever to

see the kingdom of God. We should blind ourselves by taking care not to look with evil eyes; we should maim ourselves by absolutely refusing to go to forbidden resorts.

## **2. Mortifications: essential to the saving of souls**

Matthew 5:29–30; Romans 8:13; I Corinthians 9:27; Galatians 5:24; Colossians 3:5; Job 36:21; Psalm 18:23; Romans 6:13; Proverbs 4:25;

*If thy right eye offend thee, or cause thee to offend, by wanton glances, or wanton gazings, upon forbidden objects; if thy right hand offend thee, or cause thee to offend, by wanton dalliances then pluck out the eye, and cut off the hand, than to indulge them in sin to the ruin of the soul. We must determine to keep under the body, and to bring it into subjection; to live a life of mortification and self-denial; to keep a constant watch over our own hearts, and to suppress the first rising of lust and corruption there; to avoid the occasions of every sin, to resist the beginnings of it, and to decline the company of those who will be a snare to us, though ever so pleasing; and totally abstain ourselves in the use of lawful things, when we find they are occasions of temptation to us; and to seek unto God for his grace, and depend upon that grace daily, and so to walk in the Spirit, as that we may not fulfil the lusts of the flesh; and this will be as effectual as cutting off a right hand or pulling out a right eye; it is the destruction of the old man.*

We must use our sight in obedience to God. "*Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee*", that is, we are to order our sight according to the rule of the Word, for that is the way wherein we are to walk. Eve's looking on the forbidden fruit, contrary to the Divine commandment, was the door of that sin into her heart. Ham was cursed for looking upon his father's nakedness (Genesis 9); Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt for looking back toward Sodom (Genesis 19); over fifty thousand men of Beth-shemesh were slain for looking into the ark of the Lord against His revealed will (I Samuel 6). Do not these cases tell us clearly that before we look at anything we should pause and ask whether the same will be for God's glory and our good?

Who is there among us who would not consent to the amputation of a gangrened limb, no matter how painful the operation and heavy the loss, if persuaded that this was imperative in order for life itself to be preserved? Then why refuse painful mortifications which are essential to the saving of the soul? When tempted to shrink therefrom, seriously consider the only other alternative—in hell both body and soul will be tormented for ever and ever.

## **3. The peril of neglecting mortification**

Matthew 5:29–30; Proverbs 5:8–14; Matthew 16:26; Luke 16:23; 12:5; Revelation 21:8; Matthew 25:41; II Corinthians 5:11; Romans 11:22; Ezekiel 33:6; Acts 20:26

*It is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, though it be an eye or a hand, which can be worse spared, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.* When we are tempted to think it hard to deny ourselves, and to crucify fleshly lusts, we ought to consider how much harder it will be to lie forever in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. In hell there will be torments for the body; the whole body will be cast into hell, and there will be torment in every part of it.

Men often part with some members of the body, at the discretion of a surgeon and yet they will not deprive themselves of a look, a touch, a small pleasure, which

endanger the eternal death of the soul. It is not enough to shut the eye, or stop the hand; the one must be plucked out, and the other cut off. Neither is this enough, we must cast them both from us. Not one moment's truce with an evil passion, or a sinful appetite. If we indulge them, they will gain strength, and we shall be ruined.

*"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men"* said the apostle, and so will every faithful servant of God today. Christians are to make known to sinners the severity of God as well as His goodness, to declare the reality and awfulness of hell as well as the blessedness of heaven; and if they do not so, then they are unfaithful to their trust, and God will require their blood at their hands.