The Body Does Not Offend

Jesus’s advice about dismembering one’s right eye or right hand (Mt 5:29-30), is not meant to be taken literally. The important little word is “if”. Yes, if it were literally true that a member of one’s body could cause one to sin, then one would be better off to dispose of the offending part.

However the members of our body do not really cause us to sin. It is lust in the heart that is the problem.

What Causes Sin

The members of our bodies can only be instruments of sin, not causes of it (Rom 6:12-13).

It is lust that causes sin (James 1:14-15). The "lust of the eye" and the "lust of the flesh" are not functions of the physical organism itself, but of the inward person.

For example, when a man "looks on a woman to lust after her" the problem is not in his physical eye, or in his flesh, but "in his heart" (Mt 5:28).

A Little Sarcasm

When Jesus says, "if your eye offends you..." he is speaking in sarcasm against the attitude of blaming one’s eye for what is really the fault of one’s heart.

A person’s eye does not offended him. Rather, he misuses and abuses his eye.

What Paul Said

Paul might seem to disagree with that. He observed that his mind took delight in God’s law, but in his flesh another law waged war against the law of his heart (Rom 7:14-25).

But he didn’t excuse himself and blame his flesh for the problem. Paul is addressing lack of self control.

Which Is to Be Master?

The heart wants to do God’s will, but it may not take responsibility for training, instructing, and directing the desires of the body. The body of flesh is not evil, yet left to its own devices it is easily influenced by evil. A car is not evil, but if not controlled properly by a driver, it will kill.

Your body is not suited to be your master. Your heart and mind should be master of your body which is designed and suited to obey your mind’s direction.

When condemning evil speaking, Jesus did not blame the mouth, the fleshly organ that does the speaking. He blamed the heart out of which the evil came (Mt 12:34-37).

The same applies to all members of the fleshly body.

Jesus, in Matthew 5, is not challenging you to cut off any parts of your body. Rather, he is challenging you to let him help you cut off and cast away your excuses and cop-outs regarding your sins, and the objects and circumstances of your temptations.

Jesus makes a way for you to get rid of the old sin-enslaved person you used to be and to "be renewed in the spirit of your mind" (Eph 4:20-24; Rom 6:1-14; 1Co 10:13).

It becomes clear, then, that not only can you avoid any need to dismember your body, but better still you can avoid being cut off from God and cast into hell.

Deep Thought

These questions are for you to think about and discuss. Other parts of this lesson may help you with the answers.

1. Does sin primarily stem from a fallen state of the human body passed on by sexual intercourse from one generation to another beginning with Adam and Eve? Was “death in sin and corrupted nature conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation” (THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH – 1646)?

2. Could my right eye or right hand offend me but my left eye and hand be innocent?