Cut It Out

(by Kevin Heaton)

The illustration that I am going to start with is not for the faint of heart. But, as gross and painful as it is, it nails the point and pulls out the lesson. Here we go. Have you ever had an ingrown toenail? If so, then you will know exactly what I am about to describe. If you haven’t, then you’re lucky and will just have to visualize it in your mind. I have had ingrown toenails on both sides of both my big toes. What happens is the toenail begins to grow at more of a downward angle into the corner of your toe. The edge of the toenail is pushing into your skin causing irritation and eventually cutting into your skin. It bleeds and then becomes infected. When the infection sets in, it really hurts and is really gross. If your body cannot fight off the infection, then it will continue to fester and will not heal. This is dangerous because if you allow an infection to remain in your body, over time it can get worse. Your toe could get more infected and then if bad enough you could lose it. Lose your foot. Lose your leg. And worst case scenario, an infection that festers long enough could kill you. That’s the situation. Now let’s talk about how to fix it.

When an ingrown toenail keeps growing that way and the wound does not heal, then the sure fire way to take care of it is to cut the toenail out. I’m starting to cringe just thinking about it. Here’s what is done. The Podiatrist has a numbing agent in a syringe. He then takes the needle and inserts it into your toe several places around in order to make sure the whole toe will be numb. The shots hurt like crazy. After the toe is numb, you don’t feel any pain which is great. But what you do feel is the clipping, pulling, and jerking of your toe. Although it doesn’t hurt, it is not a pleasant thought knowing that your toenail is being cut out of your toe all the way from the nail bed. They have to remove it from the nail bed so that they can put an agent in it to kill the nail’s ability to grow on that edge anymore. After they cut your nail out, they put the deadening agent on these long Q-tips and stick them down into your nail bed. When you look down it looks like your toe has antennas. Then they wrap it up and you leave knowing that some of your toenail has been ripped from your toe.

You go home and are in charge of keeping it clean. You hobble around for a week or so with some pain and tenderness, waiting for it to heal and not look nasty any more. As time goes on and you heal, the infection is gone and you no longer have a wound. All you’re left with is a toenail that isn’t as wide anymore.

That is a really gross illustration. And that’s perfect for describing sin and how it affects our lives. Sin is an ingrown toenail. It goes the opposite direction than what God wants. It destroys our lives and is a festering infection that kills us. It has to be removed if we are going to survive. Sin leads to death (**Romans 6:16, 23**; **James 1:15**). We have to cut it out. The only way to cut sin out of our lives is to repent and turn to God. God will remove our sins in forgiveness (**Micah 7:19**; **Romans 11:27**; **1 John 1:9**). Only God can forgive and make us clean, holy, and righteous (**1 Corinthians 6:11**; **Romans 3:24**). Jesus is the Great Physician who takes away our sins. If I have an ingrown toenail but do nothing about it then I will die. If I am in sin but do nothing about it then I will die. Just as our toe isn’t going to get better if we do not get rid of the problem, neither will our lives get better if we do not get rid of sin. Acknowledge sin. Repent of sin. Go to God for forgiveness of sin. Confessing sin, repenting of it, changing our lives isn’t always going to be easy. It is going to hurt, be bloody, or be sore for a while. But over time our lives heal and we see the beauty of our spiritual living.

After God has removed our sins from us, He then leaves it up to us to keep our lives clean. After you have had surgery on your toe, you have to keep it clean so that it doesn’t get infected again. God tells us that we have to keep sin out of our lives so that we don’t get infected with ungodliness again. Jesus made this point about keeping ourselves from sin: ***“If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell”*** (**Matthew 5:29-30**). If you thought the ingrown toenail illustration was gross, what about what Jesus said? If your eye causes you to sin because of what you’re seeing and lusting after, stick your fingers in your eye socket, wedge your fingers behind your eyeball, grab it, and tear it out. Flesh ripping. Tissue connections tearing. Blood. Pain. Gruesome. But it shows that we have to do anything we can to get rid of sin in our lives. What about the other one? If you’re using your hand to sin, then set it on the table, take a saw, begin to cut into the flesh, tendons, bones until you get to the other side and then cut the last strips of flesh thus completely severing your hand off. What point was Jesus making? Find out what is sinful in your life and cut it out.

Paul reminds us about keeping our lives free from sin. ***“…put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness”*** (**Ephesians 4:22-24**). We have to get rid of the sins that fester and rot our lives.

God wants to save us from the death of sin. God sent Jesus to die for us in order to save us. God promises to forgive us and cleanse us from all sin. God has called us to live pure and holy lives just as He is pure and holy. God has promised eternal life to those who are faithful to keep sin out of their lives. Because we have that healing, life-giving promise from God, then ***“let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God”*** (**2 Corinthians 7:1**).