

Mortification **Mark 9:42-50**

Jesus is still teaching about becoming great in his kingdom: “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” (v35). His kingdom is big, even bigger than the disciples imagine, and Jesus is honored in the smallest ways (vv38-41). But the life of a disciple is not just about outward service; it’s about inner change. There is a fundamental repentance when we turn to God for the first time and become Christians, and there is a lifelong ongoing repentance called mortification—putting to death our sins (Rom. 8:13). We either kill them now during our earthly lives, or they kill us forever. We’re going to die either way, but one leads to eternal life, the other to eternal death. The result of truly hearing Jesus’ terrifying warnings is peace (v50). He teaches these things because he loves us.

Causing Others to Sin

“Little ones” are children like the one Jesus just set in the middle of the disciples (vv42, 36), and by extension new or immature Christians (v38). To despise the faith of other believers and cause them to stumble is worse than drowning (v42). The stone referred to isn’t from a hand mill, but the kind only an animal (or Samson, Jdg. 16:21) could turn. The church has to repent of its habit of telling kids to they can’t have faith until a certain age or cataclysmic experience. We must nurture and honor faith wherever we see it, and fathers especially their children (Eph. 6:4). We must reject and pity false teachers of every kind.

Causing Yourself to Sin

Jesus’ logic in verses 43-48 is similar to what he said previously: “For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his own soul?” (8:36). Here he says that if it causes you temptation, it would be better to cut off your hand, foot, or eye and be a crippled now than to spend an eternity in Gehenna. Gehenna was a valley southwest of Jerusalem where Ahaz and Manasseh had setup child sacrifice to Molech, and King Josiah made into a dump where garbage continually burned and worms feasted (2 Kgs. 16:3; 21:6; 23:10). This became a metaphor for hell which Jesus uses here as *the* hellfire preacher of the New Testament. He isn’t talking about self-mutilation which Origen now knows doesn’t work (cf. Lev. 19:28). He’s talking about the urgent necessity and intense method of putting sin to death. He says to *cut off*—not to tolerate, consider, twelve-step, think about, or maybe later. “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5; cf. Gal. 5:19-21). We’re to identify these sins and get to work ending them. Seasonal fasting is trendy right now, but biblical fasting is for this sort of focused repentance and prayer (Acts 9:9). John Owen said “Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts.” We identify these sins, often with the help of trusted brothers and sisters, and turn ourselves in confident prayer to God for forgiveness and resolve. We take action. Our hands clutch at pride and possessions and are busy doing evil or good. They work to build or tear down. Our feet take us places we should or shouldn’t be. Our eyes look on edifying or defiling things. They see opportunities to give and serve or look beyond and ignore, to give thanks or complain. Our eyes should be single, devoted in purpose to the light of God’s truth (Lk. 11:34-36). Sin is powerful and alluring, so foolish Christians ignore Jesus and label every caution as legalism. The wise freely cut off opportunity to sin.

Peace that Follows Death

Fiery trials are coming, and the disciples will be made salty by them (v49). Matthew Henry said the same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay. Salt preserves and provides flavor. It’s good unless it loses its saltiness in which case it’s worthless (v50; cf. Matt. 5:13; Jms. 1:26-27). The end of these hard words, the fruit of the soul-pain of mortification, is soft hearts—peace with God and one another (v50).

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Mark 9:42-50 42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. 43 And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 48 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' 49 For everyone will be salted with fire. 50 Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

1. What does Jesus tell us not to do in verse 42?
2. Jesus tells the disciples to cut off hand, foot or eye if they cause you to sin. He is talking about ways we fall into sin. Can you think of things that cause you to sin against your parents or siblings? What can you do to change your attitude so you don't sin?
3. Recently the disciples were arguing over who is the greatest just like selfish kids on the playground! Jesus says that everyone will be "salted with fire", which means we'll go through hard situations that will make us faithful to Jesus. What hard thing have you experienced that made you "salty", made you trust Jesus more?
4. Draw a picture of the disciples doing something fun together, at peace (verse 50).

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

"And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire." --Mark 9:43