

Mk. 9:43-50 “Cut-Off Point”

For the Children: Doctors often have to cut off something that may harm us if it is ignored – an ingrown toenail or a skin cancer. Sometimes they cut (or burn) off things that aren't harmful, but just don't look very nice – like warts. It's not very pleasant to have such things done, and it may hurt a bit. But we know it's better in the long run, so we put up with it. The Lord Jesus warns that ignoring sin in our lives can be far more dangerous than cancer. Sin can lead to hell, if it is not treated. Only the Lord can remove our sin. He does that for free for His children. But then He expects us to work under His direction to remove remaining sin in our lives. If we are not interested in doing that, do we really know Him and love Him? **Questions:** How is hell described here? What does it mean for us to be “salty”? What is involved in cutting off things that cause us to stumble?

Introduction:

First Point: The Danger of Stumbling

- **Our (Second) Worst Enemy:** There is an emphasis here on stumbling or entrapment. The listing of 3 body-parts that cause entrapment (hand, foot and eye) show that the text is talking about *self*-entrapment in sin.. We are responsible for our own sinning
- **An Internal Problem:** To take the command to remove the offending part literally would not solve the problem.. For the problem is the heart, which enlists the whole body in sin
- **Terrible Consequences:** Falling into sin is one of the terrible consequences of ignoring this teaching. The other is that it can lead to hell – and will, if there is no repentance. This is God's judgement – He “casts” the sinner into hell. Hell is called “Gehenna” here – a place of evil repute (Jer. 7:30-33) and later Jerusalem's city-dump. It became a symbol of the unending physical and spiritual agony of hell, as in Is. 66:24, quoted 3 times in our text for emphasis. The repetition shows that even covenant members need to heed this warning of a fate that is far worse than we can imagine

Second Point: The Reasons to Avoid Stumbling

- **Nothing Compares:** To motivate us to take this seriously, the Lord contrasts the horrors of hell with the joys of heaven. “Life” (eternal) and “entering the Kingdom of God” are contrasted with undying death in Gehenna. Even that which is most precious to us in this life – a hand or foot or eye – is worth giving up in order to enter heaven and to avoid hell. In fact, we must be ready to give up our entire physical life for the sake of the Lord (8:34-38), all of our possessions (10:21) and our loved ones (10:29). That is the “cost” of discipleship
- **Salted Christians:** The other reason to avoid self-entrapment is that we are called to a *sanctified* life. The believer is “salt” – a purifying, preserving influence – in the world, because he brings the Word to the world (Mt. 5:13. But he must also be “salted” by Word and Spirit himself. See Ex. 30:35, Lev. 2:13 and Ezk. 43:24. Evil is burned out of us, gradually – a painful but beneficial experience. We are “salted by fire.” We ourselves become a sanctified thank-offering to God. Giving ourselves over to stumbling, however, sets back or even removes the purifying, preserving process. The command to have salt in ourselves is a command to cooperate with the Lord's sanctifying work within us

Third Point: The Way to Avoid Stumbling

- **Looking to the Lord:** Therefore we are commanded to cut off anything by which we entrap ourselves in sin. Since we can't change our own heart, this means that we first look to the Lord to give us the new birth, cleanse us by Christ's blood and aid us with the sanctifying grace of His Spirit
- **Radical Discipleship:** We also need to recognize the radical nature of discipleship – of following Christ. Nothing must be allowed to get in the way. We must be prepared to get rid of anything that hinders us in following our Master – whether pet sins, possessions, bad company or an environment in which temptations will likely beset us. Sometimes this means simply walking away from situations or company that we know we cannot handle. It also requires much prayer, and attention to Scripture. We may find additional help from fellow-Christians. Self-control and self-discipline are also necessary

Conclusion: