

Our passage today begins with a connection to the previous passage in which Jesus illustrated greatness with a child. Humility and dependence on the Father are the ways of greatness in the kingdom of God. We saw that the Aramaic for child and servant was the same word, so in our passage today little ones can be children or fellow believers.

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.”* Mark 9:42 This is a dire warning from the lips of Jesus. Millstones could weigh hundreds of pounds. Jesus could see men shaping millstones in Capernaum. I picture Him pointing to a big millstone and then pointing to the lake behind Him as He gave this warning. It was visual that the disciples would surely remember. It was also something that the Romans had done to some Zealot leaders. It is a standalone warning but also a contrast with the promise in the previous verse of reward for serving one another (9:41ⁱ). The Greek word for reward applies to both blessing and judgment. It reminds us that God has such a heart for His children, and that He will bless those who bless them and judge those who harm them (Genesis 12:3ⁱⁱ).

Hughes writes, *“Woe to those engaged in spiritual seduction—the Joseph Smiths and Jim Joneses and David Bergs and Judge Rutherfords and Shirley MacLaines! Have you ever listened to such as these and sensed the sickening horror that awaits them ... and mourned? Double woe to preachers who claim to be preaching Biblical Christianity and even use the sacred vocabulary, but redefine the words, emptying them of meaning—and thus lead untaught believers astray. It would be better for them if they had been drowned years before in the sea! Because this comes directly from the lips of Jesus, it bears terrifying authority.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

Watching a new believer be seduced away from Biblical truth by some clever extra-biblical teaching breaks my heart. Sometimes it is legalism that makes the new believer feel they are more dedicated than others, and sometimes it is a seductive compromise. The seduction often plays on the new believer's pride to be special (Proverbs 16:18^{iv}). The cults Hughes mentioned and others like them all depart from traditional biblical Christianity claiming some new revelation that adds to the truth revealed in Scripture or reinterprets in a way that separates the group from historic Christianity.

Little ones are sometimes caused to stumble by the ungodly behavior of those who claim to be believers. The zealous new believer can be discouraged from continuing in fellowship because of rude remarks, over emphasis on trivial issues, or dishonest so-called Christian contractors. We had a young family attend Wayside which seemed to be growing in the Lord. One luncheon an attendee spent the whole time telling the family the evils of telling their children about Santa Claus. The family never returned. Christians are to be representing Christ. That draws people to grow in their faith, but too often we misrepresent Him and offend the little ones. May God help us to be sensitive to encourage and not discourage the new believers. The warning in this verse is not just for cult leaders or child molesters. It is for anyone who would steer a young believer away from the truth. But then Jesus goes on to warn us about our own proclivity to sin and the consequences.

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.* Mark 9:43 In our present culture many people have rejected the concept of hell. There are those who even claim that Jesus never spoke about hell. Verses 43 to 47 are clearly warnings about yielding to our carnal nature and ending up in a place of eternal torment. Calvinists will define this as being addressed to those who were not yet born-again. Arminians will see it as a confirmation that one can lose their salvation if they give in to sin. Neither position is getting to the point that Jesus was addressing. Surrendering to our carnal desires can lead us down a path of no return. We all sin, but this is addressing how important it is to be victorious over our personal weaknesses, which is only possible through the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 6:12-14^v).

Jesus starts with the hand. The hand can be the instrument of theft. In that case Jesus is again addressing covetousness. He addressed those sins in 7:21,22^{vi}. It is in essence declaring that God has given the thing one covets to the wrong person. It is to believe the thing one covets can bring satisfaction. It is to set one's heart on the things of the world. All covetousness and theft are to proclaim that you know better than God and should take what you desire regardless of the consequences. The end of the verse declares that the consequence can be eternal justice. That is not because you stole a paperclip. It is because your heart turned from God to the world and you took the life God gave you and turned it into selfish rebellion toward the One who gave you life and breath and abilities that should have been used for good.

How do we cut off those carnal impulses. While Jesus describes it in a literal sense, I do not believe He literally means to maim oneself. If He did the world would be full of blind cripples. Jesus is emphasizing how important it is to be in control of our desires. The first clear picture of this was in the Garden of Eden. Satan tempted Eve with the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (Genesis 3:6^{vii}). She surrendered to those desires, and the consequences are more horrible than can be described. Jesus took those consequences upon Himself on the cross (1 Peter 2:24^{viii}).

The second lesson in Scripture followed shortly after. Cain saw that God rejected his offering but accepted Able's. Before Cain acted with his hands, God gave him a warning. ⁶ *The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen?"* ⁷ *If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."* Genesis 4:6,7 This warning from God applies to every situation we face. IF we act according to what is right, God will accept us and most people will too. When we see we are not accepted by God because we have yielded to our fallen nature, conviction brings us to a fork in the road. We can make a correction in our lives and strive to do well, to yield to the Holy Spirit, to have a right heart toward God. However, we can also harden our hearts and do what we feel like doing. We yield to sin that is crouching at the door like a lion. Its desire is to have you. God warned that you must master it. You master it or it masters you (Romans 6:6^{ix}). The only way we can master it is by calling out to God for His help and then to diligently resist it when it presents its lies to us (1 Peter 5:8,9^x). The Holy Spirit can change your desires if you will ask for Him to fill and empower you (Luke 11:13^{xi}).

Have you ever looked into the eyes of someone given over to rage? I have. The eyes are strangely different, as if it is not the same person. That is because they have been mastered by it. The hands are then instruments of violence. It turns you down that fork in

the road that leads to hell, the unquenchable fire. When Jesus tells us to cut off our hand, He is telling us what God told Cain, *"You must master it."*

Men often struggle with anger. It partially to do with our hormones, but we cannot blame for the way God made us. Those hormones serve good purposes. We are to master our response and attitude and not surrender to it. Cain surrendered to his rage and killed his brother. He went on to live under a curse (Genesis 4:11,12^{xii}). It does not sound like he repented, and if so, he will, as Jesus said here, go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. It would have been better for him to chop off that hand that was about to grab a rock. Better yet, it would have been the right thing to listen to God, repent, and not let that spirit of anger master him. One unguarded moment sent him down that road that leads to judgment. Could he turn at any time and choose to repent and master it? Yes! and hopefully he did. Yet, sadly, sometimes one choice can demonstrate our final surrender to our fallen nature.

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.* Mark 9:45 Our feet take us to where our heart desires to go. Even if you are driving, your foot presses the gas pedal to go where you want. There was a man who was struggling with his weight. He was a believer and knew part of the problem was his appetite for sweet things. On his way to work he would pass a donut shop. Every time his foot would automatically put the brakes on at the shop. He cut off his foot by taking a different route to work. Sometimes we avoid the temptations in our lives by not putting ourselves in the place where we are tempted.

Men who have a weakness toward pornography can download an app that connects with an accountability partner's email or phone. It blocks those sites. Should the tempted person turn off the program, the app notifies the accountability partner. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to change but He may direct you to an accountability partner.

Gluttony and Pornography will not condemn us to hell, but if they master our life and one or the other becomes the reason we live, it may very well mean we have never made Jesus the Lord of our lives. That means we have rejected Christ and His salvation. That is what condemns us on the day of judgment (Matthew 7:22^{xiii}). The warning could not be any more severe. If you think your temptation is too strong for you, you are not realizing that you have chosen it as your master. When we choose Christ, the Spirit leads us to become slaves of righteousness (Romans 6:12-14^{xiv}). We crucify the bodily passions that would compete with Jesus' reign in our lives and nail them to the cross with Jesus. *Whatever the temptation is, you are much better off without it* (John 10:10^{xv}).

In the first century, to be without a hand or foot would severely hinder your chance of providing for your family. Jesus is saying that it is better to be a humble beggar than to surrender to your temptation and end up in 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,* Mark 9:47 The desire of the eyes is one of the big three that tempt us. John wrote, ¹⁵ *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* ¹⁶ *For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.* ¹⁷ *And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.* 1 John 2:15-17 Our eyes are set where our heart desires that they be fixed. The fallen nature will set

them on the things we covet. As John said, those things are passing away. Will they bring you satisfaction? Yes, momentarily, but then you will want more or some other thing that is of this fallen world (2 Corinthians 5:18^{xvi}).

Men, that beautiful woman your eyes are set on will one day look like her grandmother. She may be a living nightmare for the man to whom she marries. Hollywood made a movie about that called Fatal Attraction. (I do not recommend seeing it.) Whatever we are tempted to set our eyes on in this world, we can find a verse of Scripture that turns our thoughts in the right direction. Righteous Job must have been attracted to beautiful women, for he wrote, *I have made a covenant with my eyes, how then could I gaze at a virgin.* Job 31:1 That is good verse to help us men when that temptation comes.

Before leaving this topic I want to tell the young ladies, if you dress in a provocative way, you will attract that kind of shallow man who is living for this passing world. His attention toward you will only be for what can please him despite his lying promises of love and commitment. Find a man who lives for eternal values, and you will have found a faithful spouse.

Sexual attraction is not the only thing that attracts our gaze. That car or boat you think would be so nice to own means years of maintenance and expenses. **Nothing in this world will satisfy you to the extent that your imagination promises.** And somehow we just neglect to consider what it will cost us in relationships, time, and godly pleasure.

A recent decades long study showed that happiness and health are not as dependent on genes or food or exercise as they are on friendships in middle age. Being a part of the body of Christ where we love and care for one another, where lifelong friendships are formed, lasts beyond this world. A personal relationship with Jesus lasts forever. It is the basis of our friendships in the body of Christ.

⁴⁸ *'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'* Mark 9:48 Jesus' brief description of hell is that it is a place where the worm does not die. The word for worm is used for earth-worms, grubs, or maggots. I would guess the intended application here is maggots. Inextinguishable fire and maggots that cannot be killed is a description that gives me shivers. Is it literal or figurative? Either way it is horrible and to be avoided at all costs. Drastic measures are worth it!

The Apostle Paul tells us there is a better way than maiming yourself, it is to die to your old nature. Listen to his instructions to the Colossians. ⁵ *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.* ⁶ *On account of these the wrath of God is coming.* ⁷ *In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.* ⁸ *But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.* ⁹ *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices* ¹⁰ *and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.* Colossians 3:5-10 Put to death what is earthly in you! Bury it with Christ. Live in newness of life! Lay up your treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19,20^{xvii}). Seek those things which are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Let Jesus in you be a light to those who live in darkness (Acts 26:18^{xviii}).

⁴⁹ *For everyone will be salted with fire.* Mark 9:49 Some manuscripts add that every sacrifice will be salted with salt. That was probably an addition to help us understand Jesus' point. Under the old covenant sacrifices were salted (Leviticus 2:13^{xix};

Ezekiel 43:24^{xx}; cf. Exodus 30:35^{xxi}). Fire was a cleansing agent, burning off impurities (Numbers 31:23^{xxii}). Remember that John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize us with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matthew 3:11^{xxiii}). The Spirit convicts us and leads us into righteousness, burning away our selfish and ungodly desires. I believe the Lord was saying that followers of Christ are living sacrifices. Paul said in Romans 12:1^{xxiv} that we are to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice. We willingly sacrifice our own desires and hopes and take on those of our Master, Jesus. Salted with fire implies that if Jesus was persecuted then we too will be persecuted. If people will not listen to Him that we can expect that there will be times when people will not listen to us (John 15:20^{xxv}). If we live to let the life of Christ in us be seen in our mortal bodies, then people will treat us like they treated Him. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians ³ *that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.* ⁴ *For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.* 1 Thessalonians 3:3,4.

It is a glorious honor to be rejected because the grace and love of Jesus show through us. If we are rejected for speaking what the truth the Spirit would have us proclaim, we are blessed. Peter tells us it is cause for rejoicing.¹² *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.* ¹³ *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* 1 Peter 4:12,13 But let us not be rejected for misrepresenting Him by being obnoxious.

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.*” Mark 9:50 In Matthew 5:13^{xxvi} Jesus told the disciples they are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13^{xxvii}). Salt was chiefly used as a preservative. It prevented food from rotting. Our world is full of the rot of sin. We are to be that preservative that prevents sin from rotting our culture and the lives in it by our witness of Christ and what is good and wholesome. In the context of this chapter, salt is not causing one of the little ones to stumble, to cut off from our lives anything that would cause us to stumble. It is to be a servant of all, a living sacrifice that willingly faces persecution for the cause of Christ. That is the Bible's definition of what it means to be a salty character. That is quite different from the way the world uses that term, but then the world often flips the meaning of Biblical expressions. Are you salty in the Biblical sense? The only way to be that kind of influence in the world is to invite Jesus to baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire (Luke 11:13^{xxviii}). It must be His life in us (Colossians 1:20^{xxix}).

When salt is no longer salty, the sodium chloride is washed out of the contaminants that were with it and all that is left is the contaminants. They have no value. Jesus is the salt in our lives. If He is not present what is left is not worth anything. It certainly does not prevent decay or add flavor. But when He is present we have peace with one another. There is forgiveness and grace. Those are the salt like influences of His life in us. The world will know us by our love for one another (John 13:35^{xxx}). May the Lord help us to put to death our carnal nature and may He be the salt in our life that makes people thirsty for Him.

Questions:

1 What is the warning in verse 41? 2 What are some examples of this sin? 3 Why were Jesus' warning so severe? 4 What description do we have of hell? 5 Which of the three categories is most common? 6 What were the early biblical examples? 7 How can we take such drastic action? 8 What must we put to death and how? 9 What does being salted with fire mean? Implications? 10 What is the evidence of being salty?

ⁱ **Mark 9:41 (ESV)**

⁴¹ For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.

ⁱⁱ **Genesis 12:3 (ESV)**

³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

ⁱⁱⁱ ¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Mark: Jesus, Servant and Savior*, vol. 2, Preaching the Word (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1989), 36–38.

^{iv} **Proverbs 16:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

^v **Romans 6:12-14 (ESV)**

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

^{vi} **Mark 7:21-22 (ESV)**

²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

^{vii} **Genesis 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

^{viii} **1 Peter 2:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

^{ix} **Romans 6:6 (ESV)**

⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

^x **1 Peter 5:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

^{xi} **Luke 11:13 (ESV)**

¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

^{xii} **Genesis 4:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

^{xiii} **Matthew 7:23 (ESV)**

²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

^{xiv} **Romans 6:12-14 (ESV)**

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

^{xv} **John 10:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

^{xvi} **2 Corinthians 4:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

^{xvii} **Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

^{xviii} **Acts 26:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

^{xix} **Leviticus 2:13 (ESV)**

¹³ You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

^{xx} **Ezekiel 43:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ You shall present them before the LORD, and the priests shall sprinkle salt on them and offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD.

^{xxi} **Exodus 30:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy.

^{xxii} **Numbers 31:23 (ESV)**

²³ everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall also be purified with the water for impurity. And whatever cannot stand the fire, you shall pass through the water.

^{xxiii} **Matthew 3:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

^{xxiv} **Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

^{xxv} **John 15:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

^{xxvi} **Matthew 5:13 (ESV)**

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

^{xxvii} **Matthew 5:13 (ESV)**

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.

^{xxviii} **Luke 11:13 (ESV)**

¹³ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

^{xxix} **Colossians 1:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

^{xxx} **John 13:35 (ESV)**

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”