

### An Exhortation to Practice Ruthless Self Discipline

#### Mark 9:43-50

Mark 9:43-50 – *“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—<sup>44</sup> where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’*

*<sup>45</sup> And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—<sup>46</sup> where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’*

*<sup>47</sup> And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—<sup>48</sup> where ‘Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’*

*<sup>49</sup> For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. <sup>50</sup> Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.”*

#### Background Notes

For background, let's jump to the topic of salt in verse 50. In Bible days, because there was no refrigeration, salt was used as a preservative. It helped to prevent the spread of decay and corruption in meat.

Salt was also used in the Old Testament offerings. In Leviticus 2:13 we read, *“And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt.”* In the offerings, the salt symbolized the permanence of God's covenant with His people. You can pick that up also in Numbers 18:19: *“It is a covenant of salt forever before the Lord with you and your descendants with you.”*

So salt was symbolic of permanence and of power to preserve from evil, and it was symbolic of that throughout Bible days. This is important to know, for what was being taught here in the final verses of Mark 9.

#### Doctrinal Points

##### 1. Natural desires sometimes must be controlled by drastic and severe action.

We all have natural desires and appetites, and we all have to admit that sometimes these desires can get out of control. Even God-given good desires must be controlled, because if they get out of control, they can be sin. So sometimes we must take drastic and severe action to control our natural desires. That's what our Lord is teaching here.

The natural desires and appetites are broken down into three categories here. In verse 43 - the hand, or the things that we choose to do. In verse 45 - the foot (or the feet), or where we choose to go. In verse 47 - the eye, or what we choose to look at or see.

In verse 43, the Lord taught that if your hand makes you sin, cut it off, and in verse 45, if your foot makes you sin, cut it off. In verse 47, if your eye makes you sin, pluck it out. This teaching would apply to desires and appetites that are *out of control*.

Are we to take this teaching *literally*? I don't see anyone here who is missing a hand or foot or eye - so I guess you're taking this teaching figuratively! Well, throughout Church history, there have been Christians who have taken this teaching literally - and actually mutilated themselves, thinking that it would make them more spiritual. But I'm going to give you three reasons why I very definitely feel that the Lord was speaking figuratively. He didn't mean to literally cut off hands or feet – He meant we must take drastic action if you have problems controlling natural desires.

Here are the three reasons why I believe the Lord was speaking figuratively:

a. All Scripture must harmonize, and the overwhelming thrust of Scripture is that we are not to mutilate our bodies. In Psalm 139 David said, *"We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are Thy works."* He was referring to his body. Certainly you're not going to mutilate this amazing body that God has made. From the New Testament, Ephesians 5:28-29 says, *"So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church."* It's hard to read a Scripture like that and then say that if your hand offends you, you should literally cut it off.

b. Cutting off your hand, cutting off your foot, and plucking out your eye doesn't really eliminate the problem. For example, you don't cure lust by taking out an eye. You can lust with one eye – in fact, you can be *blind* and still lust! Plucking out an eye doesn't cure the problem. Cutting off the hand or foot doesn't eliminate sin, and it won't keep you out of hell.

c. Nowhere does the Bible teach that we get into eternal life by mutilating our bodies. The Lord says it's better to enter into heaven maimed, than to be whole and enter into hell. The Scriptures teach that the "resurrection body" will be perfect. It will be a perfect body like our Lord's resurrected body (Philippians 3:21). Our bodies will be transformed and will be conformed and made like unto His glorious body.

So I think it's quite obvious that the Lord was speaking figuratively, and that we shouldn't literally mutilate ourselves when we have problems with sin. Our Lord meant that sometimes we must **take drastic action** to control natural desires by **ruthless self-discipline**. Do you have a problem with certain videos or literature or online "entertainment"? Are you watching things that cause you to sin? What should you do? **Cut it off!** Throw it out. Get rid of it. I'm not saying that

you have to literally throw out your TV or computer - although you may want to do exactly that! If something causes a problem, take drastic measures to regulate it.

Even good things, natural desires, hobbies, even sports like golf can be very time consuming. Something “good” can conflict with serving the Lord, and we may have to severely curtail it. The point, then, is that sometimes we have to take drastic and severe action to control natural desires that have caused us problems or led us into sin.

## **2. Hell is not annihilation.**

Hell is not a cessation of existence. The Bible teaches that hell is a permanent place of punishment for the damned. Notice at the end of verse 45: *“Into the fire that shall never be quenched.”* Look also at verse 44, 46, and 48: *‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’* (Although there is some question about the manuscript as to whether the phrase is used in verses 44 and 46, it is certainly included in verse 48.)

*‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’* What does that mean? The “worm” here speaks of the conscience, the gnawing conscience - forever. It does not die. Some people are able to live with their sin now in this lifetime because their conscience is hardened, but there the “worm does not die.” It’s permanent.

Also, the fire is not quenched. It speaks of permanent punishment. Whether the fire is literal or not, we can’t say, but it definitely speaks of permanent eternal punishment. Verse 49 seems to tie in with this as well. *“For everyone will be seasoned with fire.”* The word “for” at the beginning of the verse means it is giving an explanation. Salt gives the idea of permanent preserving power.

So the Lord Jesus taught that hell is a place. It’s not temporary. And it’s not annihilation - it’s not cessation of existence. It’s a place of permanent guilty conscience and eternal punishment. Hell is not annihilation.

## **Practical Applications**

### **1. Human tragedies are not the last word.**

If the Lord said, in figurative language, that it is better to enter into eternal life maimed than to end up going to hell with two hands or two feet or two eyes, then certainly an extended indirect application of this would be: it’s better that human tragedies occur if the end result is that a person ends up in Heaven, rather than everything going perfectly well and the person ending up in hell.

For example, wouldn’t it be better to be born with a handicap, and through that handicap you turned to the Lord for strength and help? Wouldn’t a handicap be better than being born rich and talented, but living your life for yourself, never

seeing your need of God and turning to Christ for salvation - and ending up in hell? Wouldn't you rather have the handicap - what the world might call a human tragedy?

So human tragedies are not the last word. God can use all kinds of tragedies to bring a person to Himself. Certainly this can be an indirect application of this passage.

## **2. Keep salt on your peace table.**

Verse 50: *"Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."* Remember what we said about salt in our background notes? In that day salt was used as a preservative. It prevented the spread of decay in meat. Matthew 5:13 says that we are the salt of the earth, and that's what's involved in verse 50.

Salt is good, the Lord said, but it can lose its "savor." That's not good! In those days salt could lose its preserving power, especially if a lot of impurities were mixed with the salt. In the same way we, figuratively, are not to "lose our saltiness" - because the salt of our lives is diluted by impurities.

Also we are to be at peace with one another. We're to keep salt on our table – our "peace" table! We should try to maintain peace with one another, but we shouldn't maintain peace at the expense of salt. For example, in church fellowship we try to live at peace with one another - but not at the expense of church discipline. There must be the salt on the table to prevent the spread of decay!

Colossians 4:6 says this, *"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."* We want to have tables of peace. We don't want to have walls between one another. But there must be salt on the table.

So - keep salt on your peace table!