

Mark 9:33-50 – Disciples grow through failure and millstones for those that hurt children!

This chapter seems to be full of failures. Peter spoke clumsily on the Mount of Transfiguration (vv. 5, 6). The disciples failed to cast out the mute demon (v. 18). They argued over who was greatest (v. 34). In vv. 38-40, we find them demonstrating a sectarian spirit. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Then, we will talk about sin and punishment, and the eternal importance of our deeds, walk, and controlling the lust of our eyes.

Who Is the Greatest?

Mar 9:33-34 Then He came to Capernaum. And when He was in the house He asked them, "What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?" But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest.

When they reached the house in Capernaum where they would stay, Jesus asked them what they had been arguing about along the way. They were ashamed to admit that they had been disputing which of them would be the greatest. Perhaps the Transfiguration had revived their hopes for an imminent kingdom, and they were grooming themselves for places of honor in it. It is heartbreaking to realize that at the very time Jesus had been telling them about His impending death, they were esteeming themselves better than others. The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked above all things, as Jeremiah said. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Pride is the oldest sin, and yet, it comes so naturally to us in the flesh. The disciples even struggled with it. How are you doing?

Mar 9:35-37 And He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Then He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. And when He had taken him in His arms, He said to them, "Whoever receives one of these little children in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me, receives not Me but Him who sent Me."

Jesus, knowing what they had argued about, gave them a lesson in humility. He said that the way to be first was to voluntarily take the lowest place of service and live for others instead of self. A little child was set before them and embraced by the Lord Jesus. He emphasized that a kindness shown in His name to the least esteemed, the least renowned, was an act of greatness. It was as if the kindness were shown to the Lord Himself, yes, even to God the Father. "O blessed Lord Jesus, Your teachings probe and expose this carnal heart of mine. Break me of self and let Your life be lived through me." - Believers' Bible Commentary

God's economy works differently than ours. He points this out continually throughout the Bible. Case in point, He invites lowly shepherds to the birth and women are the first to see the empty tomb. Neither could even legal testify as an eye-witness in the roman courts of that day.

Anyone Not Against Us Is for Us

Mar 9:38 Now John answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us."

It was John the beloved who reported to Jesus that they had found a man casting out demons in His name. The disciples told him to stop because he didn't identify himself with them. The man wasn't teaching false doctrine or living in sin. He simply did not join up with the disciples.

They drew a circle that shut me out—

Rebel, heretic, thing to flout;

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But love and I had the wit to win—

We drew a circle that took them in. – Believers Bible Commentary

Mar 9:39-40 But Jesus said, "Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.

Jesus said, "Don't stop him. If he has enough faith in Me to use My name in casting out demons, he is on My side and is working against Satan. He isn't apt to turn around quickly and speak evil of Me or be My enemy."

Verse 40 seems to contradict Mat_12:30 where Jesus said: "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad." But there is no real conflict. In Matthew, the issue was whether Christ was the Son of God or demon-empowered. On such a fundamental question, anyone who is not with Him is working against Him.

Here in Mark, the question was not the Person or work of Christ, but the matter of one's associates in the service of the Lord. Here there must be tolerance and love. Whoever is not against Him in service must be against Satan and therefore on Christ's side. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Mar 9:41 For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in My name, because you belong to Christ, assuredly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.

Even the smallest kindness done in Christ's name will be rewarded. A cup of water given to a disciple because he belongs to Christ will not go unnoticed. Casting out a demon in His name is rather spectacular. Giving a glass of water is commonplace. But both are precious to Him when done for His glory. "Because you belong to Christ" is the cord that should bind believers together. These words, if kept before us, would deliver us from party spirit, petty bickerings and jealousy in Christian service. - Believers' Bible Commentary

Action is louder than words. Where are you serving? Better to store up your rewards where the rust and moth will not destroy – Matthew 6:19-20.

Temptations to Sin

Mar 9:42 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

Constantly, the Lord's servant must consider what effect his words and actions will have on others. It is possible to stumble a fellow believer, causing life-long spiritual damage. It would be better to be drowned with a millstone around one's neck than to cause a little one to stray from the path of holiness and truth.

Do you think our US justice system is honoring the Lord by protecting children? This is the only crime with an outlined punishment in the New Testament, yet these crimes typically go unpunished or get probation only.

Mar 9:43-44 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— where 'THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.'

Do you realize who it is here that is talking about hell? There are those today who say that He is the gentle Jesus. Friend, He is the only One who talked about hell. Paul never talked about it, but Jesus did. And since He did, it would be well for us to listen to Him. He said that there is a place, and it is called hell. I'm confident that it is a place, and it is a place just like He describes it. - McGee

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The remaining verses of the chapter emphasize the necessity of discipline and renunciation. Those who set out on the path of true discipleship must constantly battle with natural desires and appetites. To cater to them spells ruin. To control them insures spiritual victory.

The Lord spoke of the hand, the foot, and the eye, explaining that it would be better to lose one of these than to be stumbled by it into hell. Reaching the goal is worth any sacrifice.

The hand might suggest our deeds, the foot our walk, and the eye the things we crave. These are potential danger spots. Unless they are dealt with severely, they can lead to eternal ruin.

Does this passage teach that true believers can finally be lost and spend eternity in hell? Taken by itself it might suggest that. But taken with the consistent teaching of the NT, we must conclude that anyone who goes to hell was never a genuine Christian at all. A person might profess to be born again and appear to go on well for some time. But if that person consistently indulges the flesh, it is clear he was never saved. – Believers Bible Commentary

The hand speaks to your deeds. Do your deeds honor Christ? If not, extreme actions may be required, in order to save you from the fiery pit.

Mar 9:45-48 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— where 'THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.'

How's your walk with the Lord? According to this verse, if you can't control your walk, you are better off in a wheel chair.

Mar 9:47-48 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— where 'THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.'

The Lord repeatedly speaks of hell as a place where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. It is tremendously solemn. If we really believed it, we would not live for things but for never-dying souls. "Give me a passion for souls, O Lord!"

Fortunately, it is never morally necessary to amputate a hand or foot or to cut out an eye. Jesus did not suggest that we should practice such extremes. All He said was it would be better to sacrifice the use of these organs than to be dragged down to hell by their abuse. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Remember Eve was drawn to the beauty of the fruit on the Tree in the center of the garden? How are we doing on not following our eyes that tend to wander?

Mar 9:49-50 "For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. 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."

These are strange statements. The thought is that both fire and salt purify. Fire purifies by burning away the dross and impurities. Salt penetrates and burns out the corruption and stays the spread of impurities. If we have salt—the cleansing work of the Word of God—working within us, it sanctifies and brings peace. - McGee

9:49 Verses 49 and 50 are especially difficult. Therefore we will examine them clause by clause.

"For everyone will be seasoned with fire." The three main problems are: (1) Which fire is referred to? (2) What is meant by seasoned? (3) Does everyone refer to saved, to unsaved, or to both?

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Fire may mean hell (as in vv. 44, 46, 48) or judgment of any kind, including divine judgment of a believer's works, and self-judgment.

Salt typifies that which preserves, purifies, and seasons. In eastern lands, it is also a pledge of loyalty, friendship, or faithfulness to a promise.

If everyone means the unsaved, then the thought is that they will be preserved in the fires of hell, that is, that they will suffer eternal punishment.

If everyone refers to believers, the passage teaches that they must: (1) be purified through the fires of God's chastening in this life; or (2) preserve themselves from corruption by practicing self-discipline and self-renunciation; or (3) be tested at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

“And every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.” This clause is quoted from Lev_2:13 (see also Num_18:19; 2Ch_13:5). Salt, an emblem of the covenant between God and His people, was intended to remind the people that the covenant was a solemn treaty to be kept inviolate. In presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom_12:1-2), we should season the sacrifice with salt by making it an irrevocable commitment.

9:50 “Salt is good.” Christians are the salt of the earth (Mat_5:13). God expects them to exert a healthful, purifying influence. As long as they fulfill their discipleship, they are a blessing to all.

“But if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it?” Salt without saltiness is valueless. A Christian who is not carrying out his duties as a true disciple is barren and ineffective. It is not enough to make a good start in the Christian life. Unless there is constant and radical self-judgment, the child of God is failing to achieve the purpose for which God saved him.

“Have salt in yourselves.” Be a power for God in the world. Exert a beneficial influence for the glory of Christ. Be intolerant of anything in your life that might lessen your effectiveness for Him.

“And have peace with one another.” This apparently refers back to verses 33 and 34, where the disciples had argued over which of them was the greatest. Pride must be put away and replaced by humble service for all.

To summarize, verses 49 and 50 seem to picture the believer's life as a sacrifice to God. It is salted with fire, that is, mixed with self-judgment and self-renunciation. It is salted with salt, that is, offered with a pledge of unalterable devotedness. If the believer goes back on his vows, or fails to deal drastically with sinful desires, then his life will be savorless, worthless, and pointless. Therefore, he should eradicate anything from his life that would interfere with his divinely-appointed mission, and he should maintain peaceful relations with other believers.

The members of the body reported in their deeds

“Do you know,” said a young lady to her brother, “there is a reporter to be at the ball to which we are going tomorrow, and a full account will be given in the newspapers of everybody who is there?” Ah! yes, there was a Reporter there whom she little thought of—a Reporter who is in every place to which you can go, whether it be to the house of feasting or the house of mourning, to the resort which defiles you or which purifies you, to the place of cursing or the place of prayer; and the day is coining when that Reporter shall publish, before the myriads amid whom you shall stand at the judgment seat of God, what “everyone has done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad.” What will be disclosed as to the paths on which your feet have been made to go? Will you expect to hear that you have never been, in thought or purpose, in any place but where Christ's footprints were known to be before you? (D. G. Watt, M. A.) – Biblical Illustrator