

"41 "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because of your name as followers of Christ, truly I say to you, he will not lose his reward. 42 "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble, it would be better for him if, with a heavy millstone hung around his neck, he had been cast into the sea. 43 "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire, 44 [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] 45 "If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell, 46 [where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE, AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED.] 47 "If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast 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 becomes unsalty, with what will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Mark 9:41-50, NAS95.

In this final message on this text we come to vs. 43.

Jesus begins with a reference to our hand causing us to sin. Cut your hand off rather than let your hand act like that. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell where the fire never goes out.

Then Jesus speaks of our feet causing us to sin. If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell.

Finally our Lord talks about the eye which causes a person to sin. "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 than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (vv. 47&48).

Of course we have to understand that my hand, my foot and my eyes in and of themselves, cannot cause me to sin. These external members react to the desire of the heart, the will. They are the cause in the sense that the particular sin is acted out with the participation of the hands, the feet and the eyes and any combination of them.

Jesus warning about hell where the worm does not die.

Their worm. This figure is clearly taken from Isa 66:24. In describing the great prosperity of the kingdom of the Messiah, Isaiah says, that the people of God shall go

forth, and look upon the carcasses of men who have transgressed against God. Their enemies shall be overcome. They shall be slain. The people of God shall triumph. The figure is taken from heaps of the dead slain in battle; and the prophet says, that the number shall be so great, that their worm--the worm feeding on the dead--shall not die, shall live long--as long as there are carcasses to be devoured; and that the fire which was used to burn the bodies of the dead shall continue long to burn, and shall not be extinguished till they are consumed. The figure, therefore, denotes great misery, and certain and terrible destruction. In these verses it is applied to the state beyond the grave, and is intended to denote that the destruction of the wicked will be awful, widespread, and eternal. It is not to be supposed that there will be any real worm in hell--perhaps no material fire. Nor can it be told what was particularly intended by the undying worm. There is no authority for applying it, as is often done, to remorse of conscience, any more than to any other of the pains and reflections of hell. It is a mere image of loathsome, dreadful, and eternal sufferings. In what that suffering will consist, it is probably beyond the power of any living mortal to imagine. The word "their," in the phrase "their worm," is used merely to keep up the image or figure. Dead bodies, putrefying in that valley, would be overrun with worms, while the fire was not confined to them, but spread to other objects, kindled by combustibles through all the valley. It is not meant, therefore, that every particular sufferer has a peculiar worm, or has particular sins that cause remorse of conscience. That is a truth; but it does not appear that it is intended to be taught here.

So in the reality of learning about hell, there is the duty the Lord Jesus is bringing to his disciples. To be acutely aware of how sin works in us. There are three things involved in the mortification of remaining sin, says John Owen:

1. We habitually are to weaken our lusts. John Owen describes the process like this, "When a man is nailed to a cross, he at first struggles, strives, and cries out with great strength and might; but as his blood and spirits waste, his strivings are faint and seldom, his cries low and hoarse, and scarce to be heard. So when a man first determines to conquer a lust or sin, and to deal with it in earnest, it struggles with

great violence to break loose; it cries with earnestness and impatience to be satisfied and relieved. By mortification, the blood and spirits of it are let out, it moves seldom and faintly, cries sparingly, and is scarce heard in the heart; it may sometimes have a dying pang that makes an appearance of great vigour and strength, but it is quickly over; especially if it is kept from considerable success.

"This Paul describes in Romans 6. Sin, he says, is crucified; it is fastened to the cross. To what end? 'That the body of sin might be brought to nothing.' The power of sin is weakened and abolished little by little, so that we should 'no longer be enslaved to sin'; that is, so that sin should not be our master and control us as before. This includes not only our fleshly desires, but those of the mind and the will which are in opposition to God." (John Owen, "The Mortification of Sin," Banner of Truth, 2004, p.35).

2. We never give up resisting sin. Recognize your enemy and make your mind up that you are going to destroy him by all possible means. Get to know his ways, when he attacks you and what his strategy is and be ready for him. John Owen says, "This is how men deal with their enemies. They search out their plans, ponder their goals, and consider how and by what means they have prevailed over them in the past. Then they can be defeated. Continue to attack your lusts each day." You have all seen a drama where the monster - man or beast - is finally lying dead, and everyone relaxes. It's all over, but then suddenly he stirs himself with a roar and attacks them again. He was dormant but not dead. Owen warns us, "Even when we think that a lust is dead because it is quiet, we must labour to give it new wounds and fresh blows every day."

3. As you defeat temptation you gain more power for the next engagement.

"Yield not to temptation, For yielding is sin.

Each victory will help you Some other to win."

You weaken your lusts not only by starving them but by encouraging those graces that stand in direct opposition to the lust. As you grow in humility your pride is weakened. As you grow in gentleness your anger is weakened. As you grow in patience your irritability is weakened. As you grow in purity your uncleanness is weakened. The graces

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of the Spirit weaken the lusts that fight against you. In other words those graces are strengthened by looking unto Jesus.

Most of all I would urge you to mortify sin by looking unto Jesus. He is with you. He has power over the temptation. No one in the heat of battle ever asked for him in vain. All fullness of grace is found in him and he can do for you exceeding abundantly above what you can ask or imagine.

He seeks to motivate his people to fight against sin by one great concern, he brings the fear of hell to bear upon them. They are his disciples, but he still warns them of hell. Notice how insistent he is; he does this three times. He talks of going into hell in verse 43, its portals open wide and we are in that place of woe; but then in verses 46 and 47 he speaks of being thrown into hell. Now if we are to think of hell as simply an unhappy life in this world, a state of contemporary physical and psychological pain like that experienced by a drug addict or a battered deserted woman, then Christ would have made it plain that that is the only hell there is. He would not have told the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. It was after he died that the rich man went to hell, but notice in our text Jehovah Jesus talks about men and women being 'thrown into hell.' They do not drift into it by the choices they themselves make of addiction and greed. They are taken, the Lord says elsewhere, by God's angels, and they are thrown into hell. The words are fearful but they are not my words. They are not Jonathan Edwards' words or John Calvin's words. They are the words of Jesus of Nazareth. He tells us where the wicked are going, in verse 48, "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." Those words were already God-breathed the first time the Lord spoke them in Scripture in Isaiah 66, but so that we do not ignore their alarms the Lord Jesus here repeats them. People are to be cast into a hell where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched. In other words, there will be no end to the judgment that comes upon them. Who are these people? Those who never resisted their sins, who hands and eyes and feet do whatever pleased them, they will end in hell - if what Jesus

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Christ says is true. The conviction that he can say no wrong is the reason for urging to completely mortify your lusts in hand and foot and eye, in other words, in the whole totality of life, because the hand stands for what we do, the foot where we go, and the eye what we see. Are you refusing to endure pain as you conquer remaining sin? It really hurts to kill the sin in your own heart and your own soul, but better that than eternity in hell.

Sin is not something non-physical with little relation to everyday life. We express both our sinfulness and our holiness with our hands and feet and eyes. We have been given a great commission in life, and that is to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. There are certain instincts and certain parts of our bodies that are particularly vulnerable to sin and destruction. The Lord Jesus is speaking with great seriousness about sin. He doesn't say, "It is morbid and obsessive to speak about sin because God is a God of love and so we shouldn't worry." Although it can become that if we are not careful. No, the Lord Jesus offers no easy and cheap solutions. Complete eradication of sin is our Lord's goal for every single believer and it will be done in glory. Until then we are to strive to Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. That is his word to us. Unless we have that goal, it is a goal and that means there will be failure along the way but failure is not final for the true believer.

Let me ask you, how often did or have you heard a preacher of Jesus Christ telling you that the way to God was through trust in Christ alone, but following him demanded everything. Have you been listening to people suggesting that the only purpose in being a Christian was to find complete personal fulfillment and satisfaction? What have you been hearing? Messages on how to be saved from meaninglessness and aimlessness in life, which claim, "This is the path of personal spirituality where your felt needs will be met"? Is that what you've been hearing? That is not the gospel of Jesus Christ. Could anyone preach seriously on these words of the Christ in a so-called user or seeker-friendly church? Wouldn't they frown on such preaching because they claim it puts off the unchurched? If you agree, "Yes, you are right. They wouldn't accept those warnings there. They want touchy feely-friendly talks listening to men-pleasers not

The Lord Jesus goes on to tell the disciples, "everyone will be salted with fire" (v.49).

NOTE:

1. Must have a retrospection to the six verses immediately preceding, where Jesus our Lord had persuaded to the mortification of our most beloved and profitable or pleasant lust, under the notion of cutting off the right hand or foot offending, and plucking out the right eye, under the penalty of going into a fire that shall never be quenched: as also to the law,

"13 'Every grain offering of yours, moreover, you shall season with salt, so that the salt of the covenant of your God shall not be lacking from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.'" Leviticus 2:13, NAS95.

2. They must next consider the nature of salt and fire. It is of the nature of salt, by drying up the over much moisture in meats, to preserve them from putrefaction; and to cause smart to living flesh. And of fire, to separate things not of the same kind in compounded bodies, and also to cause pain and smart.

3. They must know, that every one in the former part of the verse is the same with every sacrifice in the latter part; for every man and woman living will, or shall, be a sacrifice to God. Godly men are not only priests, 1Pe 2:5,9 Re 1:6 5:10, but sacrifices, Ro 12:1.

In the Old Testament the sacrifices were salted with salt, but under the New Testament those whose lives are living sacrifices presented to God are going to be salted with fire. There's bound to be fiery trials on our way to glory, and all of us have to pass through them. There's a war on. Trials are designed by God and they come at his appointed time into our lives. Then we must say these words to those who are sympathizing with us, "It's all right. Everyone will be salted with fire." There is no other way we can enter the kingdom of God. Count it all joy when you are salted with fire.

God is at work in our world; so are the forces of evil, and there is no time nor place for

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self-indulgent worship and comfy spiritualities that barely mention any other cost than putting more money in the coffers of the church and the pockets of preachers. There is a deadly resistance in some churches to preaching about sacrifice. The message they preach is this, "All the desires one finds in one's heart must be God-given and we've got them in order to realize them." A church member protests, "What feels so good can't be bad or God wouldn't have given it to me." In such professing Christians the salt has lost its saltiness, and so in our text the Savior is testing us about our Christian lives. If we will not mortifying remaining sin can we be his disciples? If our lives have lost their saltiness how will we ever make them salty again? (v. 49). There's a war on; the kingdom of God is coming. Be at peace among ourselves, yes, but to the world we must sting like salt stings. "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other" (v.50). How different many churches are; their salt has gone and so the members are at war with one another.

How is it with me? Am I at war with sin, even when I find it in my own heart and soul and mind and body? Am I treating sin casually? Am I prepared to be cleansed with fiery trials if this is God's will? Am I longing for my fellowship of believers to be the salt of the earth, dealing with the blandness and decay of the world around which is without Christ? Am I maintaining a loving relationship of peace with all my fellow believers who also yearn for this?

Remember that this is one indispensable part of the Christian life, but that thanks be to God we are always led to triumph in Christ. The resulting transformation in love and gentleness and humility and strength is worth every sacrifice we make, and one day we shall be with Him and be like Him. Then the good fight of faith will be over.

In Christ we are victors in the conflict