

Note: This is a very challenging passage, so as you read this message, I would urge you to filter all of my words through Scripture—discerning like the Bereans (see Acts 17:11), accepting everything that is true and rejecting everything that is false.

SERMON OUTLINE

The worth of every believer (v. 5)

- When you show hospitality to any _____, you are showing hospitality to _____.

Leading believers away from Jesus into sin is deadly serious (vv. 6-7)

- Could involve leading into ir_____ or _____ (legalism)

Sin and sources of temptation are deadly serious (vv. 8-9)

- No cure except spiritual amp_____—even if as precious as your eye
- If you have a life characterized by unrepentance, you're heading straight for hell. But not too late to repent: There is One who gives a new heart!

Where's God's love and grace here?

- Our fierce Savior
- Satan used Peter to try to tempt Jesus, but Jesus didn't _____ Peter
- Fall on our knees before the Savior, cutting off sin by repentance and faith in God. (Saying "____" to sin because we are saying "____" to God in that very area.)

- How are you leading others away from Jesus (into religion/legalism or irreligion) by words or actions?

- Where are you tolerating sin in the life God's given you?

- How do you need to repent and believe the gospel in those very areas?

- Believing the gospel, what do you need to repent of, confess, trust God in, cut off, and do TODAY as soon as you get home?

This fierce Jesus is also our Savior.

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 18 series: Jesus teaching about what the community of His followers (the Church) should look like.

Last Sunday's Theme: You can't enter (or enjoy!) God's kingdom without becoming small, like little children....and JESUS humbled Himself to redeem us and lift us up as God's own little children. The way to greatness is through smallness.

READ TEXT: MATTHEW 18:5-9

"....⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. ⁶"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." (Matthew 18:5-9, NIV)

This is a very challenging passage, and as I was preparing the sermon, I struggled against the temptation to "lighten" Jesus' words here and make them easier to hear, and also struggled to make sure I wasn't just preaching condemnation without the offer of God's grace. So I pray that through this message, God would disturb the comfortable, and comfort the disturbed—and that anything that I say that is not of God would fall away.

Image:

- **Father in junior high**, and discovered that possible to make **wood gas** from wood chips.
- **In treehouse** with wood floor and cardboard walls, set up experiment
- **Small, contained fire** under metal pot with chips in it
- **Left it going** (contained, so ok), and went somewhere else. Playing, and forgot.
- **Got a call from friend**, asking why he was burning down his treehouse.
- Flames everywhere, fire truck, etc.
- **Not too different from how we approach temptation and sin.** We might know something is wrong, but think that if we don't feed it, and as long as it's contained, we're ok. But we forget that WE are the fuel. If you see something on fire,

immediate reaction is stamping it out or douse it...but not with sin. We don't trust God, and think we can manage it. Jesus here shows the end result of tolerated sin.

Today's Theme: Tolerated temptation and sin leads directly to hell. And Jesus' love for believers is fierce—so fierce that He will not tolerate causes of sin in His Church or in our lives. Jesus is so good that He doesn't just save us from hell, but also from sin...So anything in "your" life that is leading you away from Jesus must be cut off. And while it's true that we MUST repent, it's also true that we GET TO repent: What joy there is in store for all who turn back to Him!

Jesus here focuses on tolerated sources of temptation, and so we'll address those—as well as the danger of tolerated sin itself.

A shocking passage!

- **Not a "cuddly" Jesus here:** He is fierce in His love for His followers.
- We have to hear these warnings....and **be driven to the One warning us, who is also the One who saves us.**

THE WORTH OF BELIEVERS—even the most "insignificant" (v. 5)

"...⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Who are these "little ones"?

- Little child standing by Jesus—so **children.**
- And "one of these little ones—those **who believe in me**"
- So I think "**little ones**" also can include **believers**—esp. youngest/most vulnerable (Mt. 10:40)

And **Jesus identifies with them:** Welcome one such child = welcomes me.

So when you love or show hospitality to any Christian, you are showing hospitality to JESUS.

- You're having JESUS over to dinner....sending a card to JESUS....listening to Jesus...
- **The most insignificant disciple has immense value!**

LEADING JESUS' FOLLOWERS INTO SIN IS DEADLY SERIOUS (vv. 6-7)

⁶"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

If someone were hitting your child or young niece or nephew, would you calmly say, "Please stop"? No! **Fierce love.**

- Jesus so closely identifies with His people, these little ones, that **how you treat them is how you are treating Him.**
- So when you harm one of His little ones, He is not dispassionate! OR when someone else harms you as His follower, you better believe He's angry!

Not fully clear what "causing to stumble" involves. Is this any temptation/leading into sin, or leading into unbelief and apostasy?

- Leading into unbelief and rejection of Jesus....OR leading into sin?
- I think could be **either**: Leading into sin = leading away from Jesus, vs. "welcoming"
- And **sin = anything not in line with God's will revealed in Bible, anything not from faith, anything not done to His glory. (HC)** Take God at His word even when we don't understand.
- **Includes pressuring** someone to do something THEY think is wrong even if you don't. **Could involve leading into irreligion (obvious sin) OR religion (legalism)—** away from Jesus. What could be worse than leading someone away from the source of life??

"...it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."

Not a "nice" Jesus—fierce! **"Don't you dare mess with one of my kids!"**

Doesn't need much explanation.

- **Gruesome, instant death better than leading any believer away from Jesus.**
- **We ARE our brother's keeper.**

SIN AND SOURCES OF TEMPTATION ARE DEADLY SERIOUS (vv. 8-9)

But not just about leading others into sin: **Sources of temptation in our own lives or community are also deadly serious.**

"⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble,"

What in your life is leading you into sin? What are the sources of temptation?

- May be obvious, or may be more subtle like a destructive relationship, social media use, etc.)

- **May be as precious to you** and feel as necessary as your own hand or your own eye. Feel you can't live without it.
- **But if it's leading you away from Jesus**, here's His command:

"Wear an eyepatch"? "Get some medication"? No: **"cut it off and throw it away."**

Not literal (could still sin with one eye, so problem runs deeper), **but also NOT hyperbole.**

- **Hyperbole is speaking in the extreme—but plucking out your eye is not actually AS extreme as repentance and renunciation!** Cutting off something that is leading us into sin can feel like death. And repentance is "dying": Letting go of something that we thought we couldn't live without. Reckoning our(selves?) sinful nature dead at the cross.
- **That will hurt!** It hurts to come clean about something....feels like death, but won't experience freedom without death first.
- And this is an impossible command...apart from God's gracious power for us in the Holy Spirit.
- **This passage seems to be about the deadliness of tolerated temptation in our lives. Tolerated temptation plus our sinful desires lead to sin, and tolerated sin leads to hell....**See James 1. So I will address both occasions for sin and sin itself.

Image: Gangrene

- If don't amputate, what will happen? (Like fire in treehouse.)
- This is how deadly sin is: **No cure except spiritual amputation.** Must be ruthless with sin and its causes: **Anything in "your" life that is leading you away from Jesus into sin must be cut off immediately.**
- When someone has an addiction, what happens as long as they are ok tolerating it? They drown in it... (And **sin is an addiction!**)

"It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell."

"Hell"

- **When Jesus says "hell" He MEANS "hell"!** No good thing apart from Jesus, only God's wrath against sin.
- **If you—or anyone else you know—don't repent (turn from sin towards Jesus), you will go to hell.**
 - See also James 1:14
 - **That does not mean we have to repent perfectly,** or that we have to question our salvation whenever we see sin in our lives (Bible says that if we say we don't have sin, we're liars). "The more you open up the blinds,

the more dust you see." **But if we are living a lifestyle of tolerating temptation and sin** and rebellion against God, and we aren't turning from it to Jesus for grace and cleansing (who's dealt with it all at the cross), we are headed for hell. **Indication of a heart of stone = no assurance.**

- **But if this is you, don't despair: It's not too late to repent.** There is One who saves, and gives a new heart to any who come for mercy. So come now, and place your faith in Jesus who died for you and rose for you. *This should disturb the comfortable, rather than disturbing the disturbed who are already repentant...*

WHERE'S GOD'S LOVE HERE? WHERE'S THE GOSPEL?

First half: Jesus' fierce, protective love for His own....for us! So much more comforting than a weak "God" who is always nice and never fierce.

- He is fiercely protective of you, AND fiercely protective of other believers no matter how "insignificant".
- **But even if you recognize you have made someone else stumble: Think of Peter and Jesus in Matthew 16** Even when Satan was a stumbling-block working through Peter, Jesus **didn't reject Peter!** He wouldn't for a moment tolerate Peter's line of thinking, but called Peter to cut off this demand for the cross-free life. **Repent, turn around, and follow Jesus again.**

Second half: A warning about the deadly power of temptation and sin that we flirt with or tolerate or try to manage.

- **This should drive you to your knees** before the only One who gives a heart transplant. And readiness to surrender to Him, to cut away, anything ungodly. **Sin destroys—and there is only one who destroys sin.** (See 1 Cor. 15:56-57)

How do we cut away all that causes us to sin, relying on His power?

- **Sin isn't ultimately rooted in our environment or actions.** It is important to address environmental sources of temptation, but I would argue (though test this vs. Scripture) that **the source of temptation is even closer than your environment or hand or foot or eye: It's in your heart. I sin because my sinful nature WANTS to sin!**
- **But God gives us a heart transplant!** The only way you can cut off sin is by believing that JESUS was cut off from the land of the living to do away with all your sin—so hand yourself over to Him! On the cross, Jesus, God's Son, became sin (a sin offering) for us, to make sinners into sons and daughters. He gives us new life and a new identity by His resurrection from the dead.
- **We cut off sin by daily, hourly repentance from sin and faith in God, in the good news of His gracious claim on us in Christ at the cross!** We can only say "no" to sin

and cut off its causes if we are saying "yes" to God. We can't cut off something we are relying on—so to cut off sin, we have to rely on God in that very area of our lives. An example:

- **I've wrestled with anxiety much of my life.** Often focused on trying to fix what I see as the things "causing" my anxiety, but **recently realizing that the underlying sin is the anxiety itself:** I hold onto it tightly almost as if it's as precious to me as my own eye or hand. My anxiety is about trying to hold my life together (and others' lives) in my OWN HANDS. **If I continue tolerating that sin, it will destroy me.** (And if I'm ultimately believing that my life is in my hands instead of God, that road leads to hell!) **Of course, it's important for me to address the environmental factors that might lead me into sin:** I should get enough sleep, eat well, have good patterns of work and rest, etc. **But it's impossible for me to "cut it off" unless I BELIEVE the gospel in that particular area:** The good news that my life is in GOD'S hands (far safer than in my own), that JESUS has secured me as the Father's little boy, and that God will accomplish His will in me. **God loves me enough to not tolerate this cause of stumbling that would destroy me.** And cutting it off involves regular repentance (turning from it) and faith (turning to Jesus, the good news)...and not alone: Asking others to walk alongside. And it's kind of fun to be a little less anxious! (Little by little.)
- **Will look different for each of us. Perhaps a certain relationship you're clinging to is regularly leading you into sin....**How do you need to trust that God is enough, so you can set boundaries/confront, or release this destructive relationship? **Perhaps extended time online is leading you into pornography and lust....**how do you need to say "yes" to God's gracious claim on you, and "no" to the belief that you can satisfy yourself? (Also involves eradicating sources of temptation—computer in public place, pw to spouse, accountability, etc.) **If God's convicting you of anger,** how do you need to trust that God is the just judge who is also filled with mercy, and hand over your anger and its "causes" to the cross—where justice and mercy spilled out into the world? (And sources of temptation: Remove yourself from situation, get enough sleep, etc.) Etc. (TAKE A MINUTE TO PRAY AND ASK GOD TO SHOW YOU AREAS OF TOLERATED TEMPTATION OR SIN IN YOUR LIFE... WHICH ARE DISHONORING GOD AND STEALING FROM YOUR JOY IN HIM.)
- **You cannot cut it off on your own strength, but you CAN in His strength.** And it DOES take effort. **Prayer is CENTRAL:** *"¹³ And lead us not into temptation, ⁵ but deliver us from the evil one." (Mt. 6:13) Of course, we have to be ready for Him leading us down a road to death—a cross!*

IN OUR LIVES...

So how are you leading others away from Jesus (into religion/legalism or irreligion) by your words or actions?

Where are you tolerating temptation and sin in the life God has given you?

How do you need to repent and believe the gospel (His power to raise the dead) in those very areas? Ruthless repentance and radical belief! How do you need to begin to find your satisfaction in Jesus instead of in your sin that you might be clinging to as tightly as to your own eye or hand? **You cannot cut off the causes of sin, without cleaving to God's sufficiency in Christ!**

So what do you need to repent of, trust God in, and do (throw out, confess, change, begin, relationship cut off) **TODAY as soon as you get home?** (and TELL someone who knows you well so they can hold you accountable and pray for you) **How do you need to begin believing the gospel in that very area where you are looking for satisfaction in something else instead of in Jesus?**

INVITATION AND SENDING

Jesus speaks clearly: If you—or anyone else you know—don't repent (if you don't turn from sin to Jesus), you or they will go to hell. A lifelong unbelief in Jesus as your Savior and King is a sin that refuses the only Savior there is: The only hope for anyone in this position is to fall on your knees before Jesus as Your Savior and your Lord! But Jesus Himself was made sin and descended into hell so that ALL who turn and put their faith in Him would be forever reconciled to God!

If you belong to Jesus and are in Him, you need never fear condemnation. But if the fruit of your life is tolerated temptation and sin, what evidence is there that you are actually in Him? But there is a Savior for all who will believe!

This bad news and good news **must spur us to be urgent in calling others to Jesus—the only hope they will ever have.**

If you are not yet a Christian, the cause of your sin is your heart, everything you ARE apart from God. So believe the surgeon's diagnosis (you are dead in sin) and yield yourself Him who raises the dead. He died and rose to give you new life as His very own.

And if you are a Christian, the cause of your sin is the sinful nature that has died at the cross, but still tries to grab ahold of you. So no matter how precious your sin is to you, you must cut it off.

Our hands, feet, and eyes are precious to us. And sometimes the causes of sin in our lives feel just as precious. But they are killing us.

The good news is that Jesus was cut off from the land of the living, to cut off the root of our sin. And God is able to give you the power to cut it off, as you take Him at His word that Jesus died to eradicate your sin, that it WILL be ok as you cut those old ties and hand it over to Him, and that Jesus will give you a fuller life than you've ever had by clinging to sin.

So if this passage is convicting, let it drive you to your knees: This fierce Jesus is also Savior. He went all the way to death to free us not only from hell, but from sin itself. So take Him at His word and dive into the life He's given you—which is infinitely richer and more real than any "life" sin promises.

"...⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. ⁶ "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸ If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell." (Matthew 18:5-9, NIV)

PRAYER

BENEDICTION: ²³ May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. (1 Thess. 4:23-24, NIV)

