

Focus Text

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.” **(Matthew 18:7–9, ESV)**

Avoiding Sin

As Jesus warns against those who would lead the little ones into sin, many theologians believe the “little ones” represent innocent believers. This section of Scripture gives a strong reason for that view. Jesus follows with a “woe,” and that warning works in two ways. First, He recognizes the brokenness of the world caused by the fall into sin. Dr. David Watson calls this the noetic principle of sin, meaning that sin affects all of creation. Why do natural disasters happen? Why does death exist? Sin. Why do humans do evil things in the world? It is not always because of Satan; our own sinful nature is enough. Jesus knows that the world we live in is full of temptation and that there is a tempter at work. But His woe is directed at those who open the door to temptation for others. So far, He has directed these rebukes toward the Pharisees, the scribes, and other religious leaders. Jesus envisions a world where His followers will face persecution, just as He promised. The warning of the millstone is a clear reminder: anyone who leads one of God’s precious children into sin will face His full judgment.

Jesus also reminds us that temptation is not just an outside problem. “The devil made me do it” is not the whole story. Sin comes from within, from the heart. In Matthew 5, Jesus already taught that it is better to lose a part of the body than to let sin control us. Here He gives a similar reminder. Of course, this is metaphorical language. The early church did not practice bodily mutilation, and if Jesus meant this literally, we would find eyeless, handless, and footless Christians in history—but we don’t. Instead, Jesus is calling us to examine our lives honestly. Are our eyes looking at godly things? Are our hands doing godly work? Are our feet walking on a godly path? When we fall into sin, we should repent sincerely and then change our direction.

Eternal life is worth the struggle against temptation. In 21st-century America, hedonism runs wild. The popular message is that life is about enjoying every pleasure without limit. We hear phrases like "live your truth," "whatever makes you happy," "you only live once," and "you do you." These ideas encourage people to reject any boundaries on self-expression or self-indulgence. It's no surprise that sexuality dominates our cultural and political conversations, showing how much our society is driven by pleasure.

Jesus calls us to live differently. He invites us to surrender earthly temptations in order to live a holy, righteous life that leads to eternal salvation. The Christian life is about delayed gratification. We do not need to chase every earthly pleasure. We simply need to follow Christ. One day, in eternity, we will be thankful that we denied our eyes, our hands, and our feet the temptations they once desired.

Application

Personal Journal Exercise: Guarding My Eyes, Hands, and Feet

Scripture Meditation:

"Woe to the world for temptations to sin! ... If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. ... And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away." (Matthew 18:7–9, ESV)

This week, use this journal exercise to reflect on how your eyes, hands, and feet are influencing your walk with Christ. Set aside 10–15 minutes each day to write your reflections and pray.

1. Where Have My Eyes Been Looking?

- Have I been focusing on what brings honor to God?
- Have my eyes wandered toward temptation or distractions?

Reflection:

2. Where Have My Hands Been Working?

- Have my hands been engaged in godly work and service?
- Have I used my time and energy for purposes that draw me closer to Christ?

Reflection:

3. Where Have My Feet Been Going?

- Have my steps led me into places that strengthen my faith?
- Have I wandered into environments that nurture temptation?

Reflection:

Prayer Response:

"Lord, open my eyes to see You and turn me from temptation. Guide my hands to serve Your kingdom. Lead my feet in paths of righteousness. Give me the courage to repent and the strength to follow You fully. Amen."

At the end of the week, review your journal entries. Ask yourself: *Where do I see progress, and where do I need to surrender more deeply to Christ?*

Additional Notes

“These verses mirror the logic of 5:29–30 and reuse much of the identical imagery. There Jesus applied these hyperboles to lust. Here he applies them to any kind of sin.³⁵ Disciples must radically reject anything that will lead them into evil.”¹

“The Matthean Jesus has pronounced woes against unresponsive towns in 11:21 (see there), and will do so repeatedly against the scribes and Pharisees in chap. 23, against the betrayer in 26:24, and in a rather more sympathetic tone against pregnant and nursing mothers caught up in the fearful developments anticipated in chap. 24. The woe makes a powerful but imprecise statement about the unhappy situation in which such categories of persons find themselves (whether they know it or not).”²

“Jesus pronounces the woe toward anyone who becomes an instrument of temptation leading others into sin (Matt 18:7). The saying operates on two levels: first, a lament over the world’s pervasive capacity to generate occasions for wrongdoing (Matt 18:7), and second, a specific judgment directed at those individuals who actively facilitate such stumbling (Matt 18:7).

The passage addresses believers who might be led away from their faith through false teaching or persecution[1]. The Greek term “skandalon” (stumbling block) refers to causing someone to abandon Christ and the core convictions of faith[2]. The severity isn’t about whether greater or lesser persons fall, but rather that even modest obstacles matter enormously because of how Jesus values these believers[3].

¹ 35 Cf. M. Green (Matthew for Today [Dallas: Word, 1989], 172): “Does your hand offend you, the hand raised in anger or grasping at money? Does your foot offend you, the places it takes you to and the Christian service it declines to undertake? Does your eye offend you—the ever-unsatisfied eye of the consumer society? Be single minded! Deal ruthlessly with whatever causes you to stumble in your walk with Christ in the body of his Church.”

Blomberg, Craig. 1992. Matthew. Vol. 22. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

² Nolland, John. 2005. The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press.

The woe signals impending divine judgment—God’s hand raised in wrath[4], and while stumbling blocks inevitably arise, those who create them face God’s condemnation[2]. This woe is unique to Matthew’s account and stands alongside Jesus’s other pronouncements of judgment against Chorazin, Bethsaida, the scribes and Pharisees, and the betrayer[1].”³

³ [1] R. Alan Culpepper, Matthew: A Commentary, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021), 340.

[2] Darrell L. Bock and Timothy D. Sprinkle, Matthew: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching, Kerux Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Ministry, 2025), 510–511.

[3] John Nolland, The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 735.

[4] Stuart K. Weber, Matthew, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 1:288.