

The Memoirs of Peter
The Disciple's Greatest Danger (Part 2)
Mark 9:42-48
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On any given day if you're around people who work in the workplace, you'll hear people complain about their jobs. And there are some bad jobs. There's no question about it. Perhaps in US history, fewer jobs have been more difficult or more horrific than that of a Civil War surgeon. From Ken Burns documentary on the Civil War and from a website dedicated to Stonewall Jackson's surgeon, a man named Hunter McGuire, I learned the primary reason that it was so hard, the Civil War was, on the surgeons who worked. It's because the injuries they had to deal with were dreadful and the fault of a soft lead ball named the mini-ball. It had the capacity to kill at over a 1000 yards. This soft lead bullet caused large gaping holes splintered bones and destroyed muscles and arteries and tissues. When it hit bone, it tended to expand as you can see from the one picture there, that's a femur bone. It crushed and smashed the bone so badly that the doctors really were left with no choice but to amputate the limb. Of the wounds recorded in the Civil War, some 70 plus percent of them were to the extremities. And because of this bullet and its havoc, there was really no option of the surgeon but to amputate the limb. We've all been shocked by the images of those frequent amputations and even the Civil War pictures of literally stacks of limbs that had been amputated after some of those horrific battles.

That's a terrible image and yet in the passage we come to tonight, Jesus uses the shocking image of amputation to describe just how seriously we must deal with sin in our lives. As one commentator William Lane writes, "Whatever in one's life tempts one to be untrue to God, must be discarded promptly and decisively, even as a surgeon amputates a hand or a leg in order to save the life." That's really the message that we see in the passage before us tonight in Mark chapter nine.

Let me remind you that it was in the year before His crucifixion, Jesus took His disciples and spent some five months living in Gentile areas. We've looked at those months as they're recorded here in Mark's gospel. During those months, He ministered to some of the Gentile population but He spent most of His time privately training His 12 disciples. And then in the fall of what was probably 29 AD, Jesus brought His disciples back to Capernaum. Of course that was the city on the northwest corner of the lake there in Galilee. That had been His ministry headquarters during in the great Galilean ministry.

Jesus and His disciples come back from Caesarea Philippi, back down to Capernaum there by the lake. They probably arrived back late in the day, near the time of the evening meal, we can't be

sure but it seems like from the context that after the meal was done, after they'd eaten Jesus assumes the official position of a teacher. Notice verse 35 of Mark 9, "sitting down, He called the twelve." That was the typical position of a Jewish rabbi. He is now going to instruct them. And that one evening's instruction is recorded for us in verse's 33 down through verse 50. The title of this entire section, of our Lord's teaching that night could be called *Essential Lessons For Every Disciple*. We get to sit in, as it were, and look over the disciples' shoulders and hear Jesus teach them and, therefore, teach us.

In our study so far we've discovered three of these essential lessons. The first lesson we learned in verse's 33 to 37 is that true greatness in Christ's kingdom is defined by humility. And we looked at that in great detail. We also looked at the second great lesson, the kingdom of God is greater than your experience of it. God is at work to build a kingdom for His Son and that's much greater than our knowledge. Two weeks ago we came to the third essential lesson for every disciple and that is the third crucial lesson that Jesus taught His disciples is this, sin is always our greatest danger.

Let me read for you this text. It begins in verse 42 and runs down to verse 48. Mark 9:42,
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.
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 in to hell into the unquenchable fire,
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,
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, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.

Sin is always our greatest danger. And how does the danger of sin in our lives actually show itself. Sin is a real threat to our spiritual lives primarily in two ways. First of all, as we learned in verse 42 a couple of weeks ago, by causing others to sin. When we cause others who believe in Christ to sin it's as if we were sinning against our Lord Himself. That's the essential lesson and we will face severe discipline, so much so that Jesus said it would be better for you if you were to die a violent and premature death.

Tonight we come to the second way that sin becomes a serious danger in our lives, not only by causing others to sin but also by tolerating personal sin. Jesus explains this in verse's 43 down through verse 48. Now before we get into unpacking the text itself, one brief note about the biblical text. You'll notice that the NAS brackets verses 44 and 46 and in the marginal note in both of those cases says that these verses do not appear in the oldest and best manuscripts. That's true and so while they don't appear there, however, the statement itself is authentic. We

know that because the same exact statement occurs in verse 48 and it's in all the manuscript evidence. So we will deal with that saying in its time, when we get there. It was probably repeated after the other two warnings accidentally as a scribe was copying and included it in some manuscripts. And it began then that mistake to be duplicated. Don't forget these words are addressed to His disciples, the 12 are there.

Now before we work our way through this section, it's absolutely crucial that we understand what our Lord does not mean here. Sadly, this passage has been widely misunderstood in the history of the church so let's start by looking at what our Lord is not saying. First of all, He is not saying that the physical body is inherently evil. There are a number of passages that talk about this. First Corinthians, Paul says our bodies, now that we are in Christ, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. You also see in Philippians 1 that Paul says, it's my desire if I'm going to be here in this life, as well as if I die, that Christ will always be exalted in my body. So the body is not inherently evil as Greek dualism taught. That's not the biblical view at all. So, Christ isn't saying that.

Secondly, He's not saying that sin is primarily physical, a physical act. That certainly runs contrary to passages like 2 Corinthians 7:1 where we're told to cleanse ourselves from all defilement of both the flesh and the spirit perfecting holiness in the fear of God. It also runs contrary to what the Apostle John says in his first letter, 1 John 2:15 when he says that everything that's in the world, that characterizes the world, has far more to do with what goes on in the heart, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life, and then it radiates out in to behavior. And so our Lord is not saying that sin is primarily physical.

He's also not saying that physical mutilation can somehow protect us from sin or accomplish true Spiritual change in our lives. The truth is the Old Testament strictly forbade masochism and mutilation of the body in various forms. Sadly though some in the early church didn't understand that. There were those, if you read any church history, who tried exactly this approach. They misunderstood our Lord's words here and in other places and they actually mutilated their own bodies. For example Origen of Alexandria, who lived from about 185 to 254 AD, had himself emasculated because he thought that that would enable him to overcome his sexual temptations. By the way, it wasn't long after that that one of the church councils, I believe it was Nicaea, outlawed the practice. Made it clear that that's what that's not what our Lord was teaching. And that's because our bodies are simply acting in response to our hearts and minds; our bodies don't act independently. They do what our wills and desires tell them to do. They're simply the instruments by which we carry out the desires of our hearts. And so to cut off parts of the body doesn't cut out the heart that moves the body. So our Lord wasn't teaching that.

Neither was He teaching that there is real spiritual value in asceticism. In harming the body in some way, inflicting pain or deprivation on the body. He's not teaching that. Some have thought that that's exactly what the Lord is teaching that there was some benefit, some value in that. And unfortunately, this idea is becoming more popular in the evangelical church today as we sort of see people drifting away from our reformation roots, they're drifting back to medieval theology and therefore they're finding a lot more benefit and practical value they think in those monastic type practices. They're experimenting with medieval spiritual practices and customs. They're students in Christian colleges represented by families in this church that are required to fast for many days and required to practice mystical meditation. *Christianity Today* issued a magazine in which they praised the new monasticism that's characterized in today's emergent church movement. That encourages harsh treatment of the body as a means to true spirituality. Deprive the body, they say, and that's going to help you grow spiritually. Is that what Jesus means? No, absolutely not.

In fact, look at Colossians chapter 2, and I won't spend long here. But I mentioned this passage this morning; I just want to highlight it for you, Colossians chapter 2. He talks about those who add to the Scripture who, verse 18, are involved in the worship of angels and visions, they're into visions and supernatural experiences, they're not holding fast to the head that is Christ, verse 19, "If you had died with Christ" verse 20, "to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to" (These sort of external extra-biblical decrees or rules. Rules like) "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" This is essentially a form of asceticism, it's saying you need to deprive yourself of certain things and if you do that, then that's going to make you more spiritual, that's going to put you more in touch with God if you deprive yourself of the things He's given us. And He says in verse 23, these are, and by the way at the end of verse 22 he says, "this is in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men" not God. Verse 23, "These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom, but it's simply self-made religion and this self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, are of no value against fleshly indulgence."

How could Paul have made it any more clear than that? It's of no value. So that's not what our Lord is saying. The Bible does not command or even encourage any form of asceticism. Depriving yourself with the idea that somehow that's going to either earn you favor with God or it's going to make you more spiritual.

So if that isn't what Jesus meant, what does He mean? Well as we let this passage unfold, we could say that Jesus, here, makes six distinct affirmations of about sins danger and what we must be willing to do to cut it out of our lives. Let's work our way through these six affirmations. Number one, tolerating our own sin is the greatest danger to our souls. Notice in verse, back in Mark 9:43, Jesus refers to being caused to stumble, He uses that same expression in verse 45, "stumble." And then again in verse 47, something causes you to stumble. That's the same

Greek word we saw back in verse 42 last time we studied and I'm not going to unfold it in detail like I did then. Let me just remind you of the conclusion and that is in this context it means to cause to sin. Jesus says that anything that causes us to sin puts us in such mortal danger that we have to be willing to take extreme measures to protect ourselves. Sin is our greatest danger, tolerating it in our own lives. Anything that causes us to stumble is extremely serious, it's a great danger to our spiritual lives.

The second affirmation our Lord makes is not a pleasant one and it's not popular in today's Christianity, but it's a reality, eternal punishment in hell is a reality. You know many New Testament writers comment on this but no one in Scripture has more to say about hell than our Lord. The word hell is used 12 times in the New Testament, 11 of those times it comes from the lips of Christ. The only exception is James 3:6. First of all, I want you to notice how Jesus, here, identifies, as He does in every place, that there are only two alternatives after death. The first one is "to," notice verse 43, "enter life." He repeats it again in verse 45, "to enter life." Down in verse 47, "to enter the kingdom of God." That is one alternative after death, to enter life or to enter God's kingdom where He rules. The kingdom of Christ as it's also called in the New Testament.

The other alternative is described in verse 43 as "to go into hell." In verse's 45 and verse 47 it's "to be cast into hell." Notice how that ratchets up, in one case it's to go into hell and the other it is to be forcibly thrown into hell. It's a graphic picture but one that that really borrows from what you read at the end of Revelation. And Matthew, in the parallel passage, Matthew quotes Christ as saying, "to be cast into the fiery hell." And to be cast into eternal fire. So those are the two alternatives, that's it. There're no other options. Our Lord made it clear. It's one or the other.

Now notice how this place is described; in verse 43, He says, it is "the unquenchable fire." Literally, the Greek text says, "the fire" and then He uses a word that comes right into English, "the fire, the asbestos." It's literally what the Greek text says, the fire, the asbestos. In other words, it's fire that can't be extinguished. Matthew calls it, as you see here, "eternal fire." That means it's suffering that lasts forever. In fact, look at Matthew chapter 25, Matthew 25 verse 46. This passage makes it so clear that these are the two eternal alternatives, Matthew 25:46, this is at the judgment that's described here, we've been through this passage recently. But look at what our Lord says to those who do not know Him. He says, verse 46, "These will go away into eternal punishment..." and then He says, "but the righteous into eternal life." Now notice you have two alternatives again. On the one side eternal punishment on the other side eternal life. You have the damned into eternal punishment, those He deems as righteous, not as we know by their own righteousness, but by the righteousness of another, into eternal life. But the key here is the words for eternal are exactly the same. So whatever happens to the righteous, however long

that is -- is exactly the same duration as the punishment of the wicked. It's eternal, in the same way that we enjoy eternity. So however long eternal life lasts, there will be eternal punishment.

Now back in Mark 9, Jesus also teaches here that those who will be cast into hell will have bodies. Notice verse 43, "having your two hands, to go into hell." Verse 45, "having your two feet, to be cast into hell." And verse 47, "having two eyes, to be cast into hell." It is a place, according to Jesus, where there will be bodies. We understand that even from Revelation, don't we? There, John the Apostle describes a resurrection in which the unrighteous are raised from the dead united with their bodies and then cast into the lake of fire as it is described there. And with that in mind, our Lord here, and in Matthew, associates this place of eternal punishment with fire. The word "fire" is used more than 20 times in the New Testament to describe hell. Here are just a few examples: the fire, unquenchable fire, the fiery hell, the furnace of fire, the eternal fire, the fiery hell in Matthew 18 again. The fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries, the punishment of eternal fire, the lake of fire which burns with brimstone, the lake of fire and brimstone, the lake of fire, the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. All of those from texts in the New Testament and those last from texts in Revelation. Fire. What does the fire refer to? Are they literal flames as we know them? That is clearly possible. But we just don't know for sure. Many orthodox scholars from the history of the church have taken the fire to be literal. Many others have believed it to be metaphorical. But folks, this much we know, at the very least God chose an image from this world to help us picture the terrible reality of hell. There will be very real intense physical and mental suffering. As John MacArthur writes, "if the fire is symbolic, the reality it represents will be even more horrifying and painful."

Now in Mark 9, Jesus uses a Greek word for hell that is "gehenna." That's the word. When you read the word hell there in your English text, it's the Greek word gehenna. Matthew refers to the gehenna of fire. Gehenna is the Aramaic form of the Hebrew word "gai ben hinnom." It means, literally, "the valley of the sons of hinnom." It's called topheth as well in the Old Testament. This was a valley that was just southwest of the city of Jerusalem, just outside the city walls. In the Old Testament it's notorious because children were offered there in fire to false gods, literally burned, roasted alive. But once the people repented of their idolatry, this site where that happened became a kind of pariah and Josiah declared the place to be unclean in 2 Kings 23. By Jesus' day, in the New Testament times, it had become the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. A trash fire burned there all the time, giving off a horrific odor. Because of the trash, it was also infested with maggots. So it served then as a profound picture or image of the reality of eternal hell. In addition to that, sometimes the bodies of criminals were dumped there and burned instead of receiving a proper burial. So Jesus often uses this word to describe hell. It's like gehenna, He said.

Notice verse 48, how He describes it there, "where THEIR WORM DOES NOT DIE AND THE FIRE IS NOT QUENCHED." That verse, as you see, is in all caps, it's taken from the Old Testament. It's

specifically taken from Isaiah 66, turn back there. Isaiah 66 and verse 24, the last verse of Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah says,

they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. (God says) For their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched; and they will be an abhorrence to all mankind.

Isaiah, here, pictures believers gazing upon the corpses of God's defeated enemies. The picture is of a battlefield and those who have rebelled against God have been slain by the divine warrior and now their carcasses litter the battlefield. What follows that is so bad that the rabbi's, when they read this portion of Isaiah, changed the reading when they read it publically. Because on occasion, the victors in a battle would leave the bodies of their victims on the field unburied. It was the ultimate act of desecration. What the birds didn't eat, the worms finished. In our world, when a maggot consumes its prey, it dies. And when a fire has burned up its fuel, it goes out. But here, and in our Lord's words in Matthew 9, in hell, the maggot doesn't die and the fire never goes out. That is figurative language for the eternal duration of hell.

Now this is hard for me to say, this is hard for me to preach, it's hard for you to hear. But folks, understand this, most people in our world today cannot allow the possibility that there is a place of eternal pain like this. But there is no question, as you can see, that our Lord taught these things about hell. And so to reject hell is to reject our Lord. In this passage that we're looking at in Mark 9, our Lord denies the mortality of the soul. You will live somewhere forever Jesus says and they're only two alternatives that's it, eternal punishment or eternal life. You will either enter life and enter the kingdom of Christ and God or you will be cast into hell. That's it the soul is not mortal, it will live on somewhere forever. He also denies universalism, the idea that everyone will be saved. Clearly, He rules that out in this text. He rules out second chance or second probation, this is the sort of mistaken idea that after death salvation will again be offered to those who died without Christ and they'll have a second chance and then if they believe they'll be in. Our Lord certainly doesn't teach that here or anywhere else. In fact, in several places He slams the door on that.

Our Lord also here denies annihilationism. This is popular among even men who have been a part of evangelicalism. Men like John Stott, whose name you'll hear me quote from time to time. Unfortunately, he's bought into the fact that unbelievers will ultimately be completely destroyed and actually cease to exist. Our Lord makes it clear by the quotation from Isaiah that that is not true, "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched." There're only two choices for eternity, God's kingdom or the fire that can't be put out. That's it.

Can I plead with you tonight? To understand that. We're all mortal. We don't think we are, we live as if we were immortal. As if we'll never die. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but if our

Lord doesn't return every single one of us in this room will die. And according to our Lord Jesus, we will open our eyes in one of two places. Let the reality of that burn into your soul and make sure you know Jesus Christ.

There's a third affirmation, not only does He say, here, that tolerating our own sin is the greatest danger to our souls and that eternal punishment in hell is a reality, but thirdly sin is what will ultimately send a person to hell. You see that? He says if you keep stumbling, this is the idea behind each of the warnings He gives here, three of them, if you keep stumbling that is if you keep sinning, you're going to go into hell. Never does the Scripture say that that God will send a person to hell for original sin inherited from Adam. Of course, we do inherit sin from Adam, we inherit moral pollution, we inherit guilt, we inherit moral inability. All of those were inherited from our parents, ultimately from Adam. All of those do render us guilty enough to go to hell according to Romans 5, but nowhere does God say a sinner will be sent to hell for the moral corruption, moral inability and real personal guilt that we inherited from our parents and ultimately from Adam.

Instead whenever the Bible says that sinners will be condemned to hell, it always makes the reason actual, personal sin. In Mark 9, Jesus says that a pattern of sinning will cause a person to be cast into hell. That's the message of other texts as well. I'm not going to turn back to Matthew 25, but turn with me to Revelation 21. Here's one example and you can just see it so clearly. What determines that a person will be thrown into hell? Verse 8 of Revelation 21, it's patterns of sin. "But for the cowardly and the unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

That is a pattern you see throughout the New Testament. A person will be condemned to hell because of sin, because of transgression against the law of God. Both the law of God written that many people have and the law of God according to Romans 2 written on the heart of every man whether he has the written law of God or not. That is what will condemn a man or a woman to hell.

Number four, nothing is more important than your soul's eternal destiny. That's what Jesus is saying here. Nothing is more important than your soul's eternal destiny. The key issue in this life is making sure that we are prepared for the next that is for eternity. Jesus contrasts living here in this life without those things that are most precious to us and He contrasts that with going to hell when we die. And Jesus says it's not a hard choice. What's most precious to us? Well, in this context, notice what it is. It's our own bodies, our hands our feet our eyes. When I read that text I was reminded of Job, you remember Satan comes and he afflicts Job with trials but they're all external to his body and Job doesn't respond and so Satan comes back to God and says, "Well, the reason he hasn't yet given in and cursed You God is because you haven't touched his body, if You afflict his body with pain, then he'll curse You, because that's really

personal, that's really precious." Satan was wrong about Job, but he was right about one's own body being his most precious possession in this life and we do whatever we can to protect it. If your stuff is going to burn up but you can save your own body, you do that. Why? Because it's the most precious thing you have, life and your body. So Jesus is saying that your eternal destiny is worth giving up anything, even those things that are most precious to you, your hand, your foot, your eye.

And Jesus really underlines the point here by choosing the right hand, the right foot, and the right eye. In the ancient world just as today, most people are right handed. There are only about 7% of us who are in our right minds. Most people are right handed, so for the majority of people, it was the right eye, the right hand and the right foot that were both dominant and, therefore, most important to them. Jesus says your eternal destiny is more important than keeping the most precious things in this life. You think for a moment right now of the things, in addition to your body and its health, that are most precious to you. Jesus says giving up those things to have eternal life is worth it.

Number five, a fifth affirmation He makes about sins danger and what we have to be willing to do is we must hate sin in all its forms and be willing to kill it in us whatever the cost. Notice what he says back in Mark 9, He says "if your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. Better to enter life crippled." Verse 45, "if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. Better to enter life lame. If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out, better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye." Remember, He's talking to His disciples here and He's telling them listen when you look at the sin in your life, you must hate that sin in all of its forms and be willing to kill it whatever the cost may be.

This is a constant theme of the New Testament. Let me just show you a couple of these texts. Look at Romans chapter 8, Romans chapter 8, he says, verse 13,

"If you are living according to the flesh, you must die;"

He's contrasting, here, the person who's in Christ and the person who's not.

"If you're living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit"

(this is us)

"you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Christians put to death the deeds of the body, the sinful deeds of the body. You see it again over in Romans 13 verse 14,

"put on the Lord Jesus Christ..."

He's just said don't live like the world lives but instead, verse 14,

"put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts."

Cut off the sin in your life, cut off the sources of sin. Look at Colossians chapter 3, Colossians chapter 3 verse 5, Paul says you've been united to Christ,

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed which amounts to idolatry.

Don't walk like that. Don't live like that. You'll notice in verse 5, next to the word "consider" in the NAS, there's a little number that points you out to the marginal reading. Notice what it says literally. Literally, "therefore put to death the members which are upon the earth." In other words, kill sin in all its forms in your life. Don't let it live.

William Hendriksen the great Presbyterian commentator writes this, the lesson is this. "Sin is a very destructive force, it must not be pampered, it must be put to death. Temptation should be flung aside immediately and decisively. Dilly dallying is deadly. Halfway work measures wreck havoc. The surgery must be radical. Right at this very moment, and without vacillation, the obscene book should be burned, the scandalous picture destroyed, the soul destroying file condemned, the sinister yet intimate social tie broken." Listen folks, we can't play with sin. Jesus is saying you cannot play with sin and not be terribly, terribly burned.

Now understand that not one of us has the power to put sin to death in our lives. We simply seek to do that we seek to obey our Lord and He gives us that power. That's what Romans 8:13 said, did you notice it? "If by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body." You and I can't do it alone. It has to be the work of God in us. That's what Paul says in Philippians 2, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you." That's the reason you can do it. It's by His strength, it's by His power. We must hate sin in all its forms and be willing to kill it in us whatever the cost.

Number six, the ultimate goal we pursue is a pure and holy heart. This is really the primary lesson. You see, Jesus taught these same truths early in His ministry. And in that context, He emphasized it was really the heart that was the real issue. Look back in Matthew chapter 5. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses almost identical words, but here, He connects it to having the right kind of heart. Matthew chapter 5, look at verse 27, Jesus is correcting the misunderstanding of the Old Testament Law. He's not pushing it away or wiping it aside or abolishing it, He says I came to fulfill it. And so He's teaching what it really means, He says you've misunderstood, He says,

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery';" And you stop there, with the act. That's the only thing God wants from you is don't commit the act.

"but I say to you"

You misunderstood, here's the real deal

"everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

And then on the heels of that statement, our Lord uses this statement,

“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it’s better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Do you see the connection? Jesus is saying deal with sin in your life not merely at the external level, not merely at the act, but at the thought. So not only should we get radical in cutting sin out of our lives, that is acts of sin, behavior of sin, external things, but we ought to get radical in cutting the thoughts and attitudes and lusts and pride and all of the things that go on inside, the ultimate goal is a pure and holy heart. The real goal is a moral character. You’ve heard me say this before, it is a moral character that resembles Jesus Christ. When we talk about being like Christ, that’s what we mean. You’re never going to be like Christ in terms of personality, in terms of, so, it’s like nobody would be able to extinguish the two of you in terms of how you communicate, or any of those things, we’re talking about a moral character that is like Jesus Christ. Not merely refusing to commit certain sins or external sins, not merely refusing to commit certain sins of the heart, instead all of them. Lloyd-Jones writes, “This is the point in which we often fail. We have only a negative conception of holiness and therefore we feel self-satisfied.” What’s the real goal? Romans 8, “He predestined us to become conformed to the image of His Son.” That’s God’s predetermined destiny for us. Amazing.

So what should you and I do in light of our Lord’s teaching here? How should we respond? Number one, we should examine the reality of our faith. Our Lord says that those who claim to be His disciples but who are tolerating an ongoing pattern of sin, may in fact be not His and end up being cast into hell. That’s what Paul said in Second Corinthians 13:5, “examine yourselves to see if you’re in the faith.” If you and I are tolerating in our lives an ongoing pattern of unrepentant sin, then we ought to be examining the reality of our faith. I can’t tell you how many times I have talked to people both here and in California and urged them, they’re in some sort of ongoing pattern, in some cases of gross sin, and I say to them you need to examine your faith, you need to examine if you’re really in Christ. And without even a thought, their immediate response is well of course, you know I prayed a prayer when I was a kid, or I walked an aisle. I said you better take that very seriously. You say, how can I know? Well here’s one test, right here in this passage. Are you willing to take radical steps to deal with your sin? If you find out that you’re not really in the faith, this passage should drive you to Jesus Christ. The knowledge of your sin, the knowledge of our Lord’s perspective of it, the reality of eternal hell should drive you to Jesus Christ before your head hits the pillow tonight.

Number two, we should amputate from our lives anything that we know regularly tempts us to sin. Amputate from our lives anything that we know regularly tempts us to sin. Cut off your right hand or your right foot, pluck out and throw away your left eye. Now why does Jesus choose these three body parts? Well, the hand speaks of what a person does, the foot of where a

person goes, and the eye of what a person sees. This isn't all inclusive but it gives you a pretty wide swath here, doesn't it? The hand, are there activities in your life that cause you regularly to sin? Maybe web surfing, maybe movies, television, maybe books you read, magazines you get, maybe the computer, maybe it's business lunches or business dinners. Maybe it's going to the gym. Maybe it's social networking. I don't know. But ask yourself are there activities in my life that regularly put me in a place of temptation to sin? And I answer the call to sin. With the foot, are there places that set you up to sin? Places you go that really set you up to sin and you see that regularly in your life. Maybe it's the mall. Maybe it's a friend's house. Maybe it's a convenience store. Maybe it's your normal route to and from work. Maybe it's your workplace, maybe it's your business trips. I don't know what places there are in your life, but are there places in your life that bring regularly temptation to sin and you fall into that sin? What about your eye? Are there things that you allow your eyes to look at that causes you to sin? Again, some of the same things, magazines, Facebook, Youtube, the newspaper, whatever it is. In any case, in every case, Jesus says you must cut that thing out of your life no matter how precious it is. Go a different route home, get another job. Get rid of your computer. It's what Jesus is saying. You must be willing to get radical with your sin.

Now just so I can flesh this out a little bit, let me give you a practical example of what this might look like in real life. I've called this last part *Spiritual Amputation: A Case Study*. Very briefly. Men and women are increasingly finding themselves struggling with the internet. Most often this comes in two ways, either pornography or pursuing a sinful relationship. Maybe re-igniting an old relationship, becoming involved with someone emotionally in a chat room or in other ways. Listen, if you struggle with sin when it comes to the internet, how, and this is just a case study; yours may not be this and you can make the application, okay, you can make the point for your own struggles. If you struggle with sin when it comes to the internet, how do you practice what our Lord is commanding in these verses? Well the flow of the steps you take might look something like this. You might start by simply installing a safe surfing software like Covenant Eyes or Net Nanny on your computer. Making your history available to the people in your life who can keep you accountable. If that's not enough, you might consider putting your computer in a public place, a public area of your house where nothing private can really be done. You might have someone else control the password for logging on to the computer if simply putting it in a public place isn't working. If that doesn't work, then commit not to use the computer when you're alone or others are in bed asleep. You may, gasp, have to get rid of the internet altogether. Or you might even have to get rid of your computer. I know what you're thinking, but everyone has to have internet access. You can't live in today's world without it. Is the internet more important than your right eye, your right hand, your right foot? Jesus said be willing to deal with your sin even if it means getting radical, taking extreme steps, not mutilating your body, that won't help. But getting radical with the things in your life that lead you into sin. Disconnecting from those as much as you can.

There's one other response all of us should have to this passage and that's gratitude. Because I don't know about you but when I read this passage, I'm more than painfully aware that were it not for the intervention of Jesus Christ, I would be going to this place Jesus describes. And so would you. It is this, the wrath, the eternal wrath of a just and Holy God that our Lord has rescued us from so that someday we will open our eyes after death in His glorious presence, the Savior. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Christ. Thank You for the wonderful reality that our sins, not in part, but the whole, are nailed to the tree and we bear them no more. Father we give You great thanks and yet Father we've been warned in the passage by our Lord as He talked to His disciples and to us to take our sin seriously, to be willing to take radical steps to deal with the sin in our lives. Father help us to do that, help us to be diligent to cut sin out of our lives to do everything we can. Lord, we know we will never be perfect in this life. We know we will continue to sin. But Father, don't let us take sin lightly. But help us to take it seriously even as our Lord instructed in these verses. And Father, for the person who's here tonight who's lived a life pattern of ongoing unrepentant sin, help them to see where by our Lord's words they are headed and before they go to bed tonight may they pour out their soul to You turning from their sin and embracing Jesus as Lord and Savior. And Father, for the rest of us who know You, give us hearts of gratitude for what our Lord has saved us from. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.