

## **The King's Clear Warning**

**Matthew 18:7-9**

### **Introduction**

In this passage Jesus lays out the punishment for those who cause others to sin. I almost entitled this message “**How Not To Go To Hell**” or “**How To Escape Hell**”. In highly metaphorical language Jesus will issue a series of warnings. But there is nothing metaphorical about the warnings themselves. Some people toy with the idea that sin is not as terrible as the Bible claims; or that the consequences of sin are not as horrific as the Bible describes.

Jesus calls on His disciples to avoid offense (v.7); control what you do (vv.7-8) and take charge of what you see (v.9).

### **Caution! You are about to enter the no sin zone!**

#### **Caution! Avoid Offense (v.7)**

*Matthew 18:6–11 (NKJV)*6 “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.

Do you recall the context of these warnings? The context is greatness in the Kingdom. Jesus uses the illustration of a little child (vv.1-6). When we honor the child we honor the Savior Himself. When we hurt the child, damage the child, sin against the child—we hurt the Savior we sin against the Savior. Jesus speaks of the penalty (v.6) of hurting the child and the heavenly protection assigned to the child (v.10). A detail of Spirit beings are tasked with the child's welfare and report to heaven (v.10).

In verse 6 Jesus issued a warning! Jesus in effect says it is better to face the prospects of a violent death in the here and now—then to suffer the just punishment in the next life for setting a young believer down a path of destruction.

*7Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!*

Woe is a word of cursing and condemnation. The world is under a curse for its determined effort to lead people astray. The world is under a curse not only for its commitment to sin but because of its blatant disregard for the solution to the problem of sin.

Jesus condemns this world as a source of offenses and misdirection. The verb is *skandalizo*—means far more than simple offense—it means “causes to stumble” (NASB) or “causes to sin” (NIV). Another similar word *skandalon*—means a temptation to sin.

How does the world cause people to sin?

## The King's Clear Warning

### Matthew 18:7-9

How are we in danger? The source can come from fellowship (v.6); or the world (v.7) or the sinful nature itself (vv.8-9).

### Two Woes

Jesus pronounces two woes; one on the world and the other “*to that man by whom the offense comes*”! Here the world means the world of unbelief—and almost certainly means the religious leaders who have set their sights on **destroying Jesus** and crushing the Jesus movement. The world can best be described as that system of beliefs that stands in opposition to God and God’s revelation in Christ. **But the system provides no excuse for the individuals who make their own contributions in causing others to sin.**

The whole world is under judgment for sin. Each individual will receive judgment for sin. The unbeliever is already on the Broadway that leads to destruction. The unbeliever is simply waiting for judgment.

The responsibility to point people in the right direction—to lead people away from sin and point people in the direction of righteousness falls on government, organizations, churches, institutions and individuals.

The governments and churches have no right to call people to sin or encourage people to sin. But sin they will and sin they must. Jesus makes it clear—that excuse—will not prevent judgment.

We must be very careful not to tempt people to sin or cause people to sin. That’s the devil’s job. The Bible condemns false teachers and false teaching. The false teacher not only teaches what is false but solicits and seduces others to commit the same sin. The most obvious way to cause another to stumble is to invite them to sin!

It might mean reading a certain book or watching a certain movie or visiting some internet web site. It might be encouraging gossip. Eve is the classic example of solicitation. After she disobeyed God she gave her husband the fruit and encouraged rebellion against God. Aaron the first High Priest of Israel—agreed to the sinful demands to fabricate an idol that the people could touch and see (the golden calf). We wouldn’t hesitate to protect our children from physical harm but what about the spiritual harm that comes when we allow them to see sexually explicit images or videos or movies or products with occult or demonic themes? We can also cause each other to stumble or sin indirectly. Fathers are commanded to not provoke their children to anger but we can provoke them by demanding unrealistic expectations or demand unrealistic achievements, by being overly critical, overprotective over permissive (see MacArthur’s Commentary p. 106). Another way we can cause people to stumble is through sinful example. Without saying a word, believers can be led into sinful attitudes and practices by watching the bad example of others. We as parents must be very careful. Our children are watching and copying our example. A man given to drunkenness once stole out of his house one winter night

## The King's Clear Warning

### Matthew 18:7-9

to go to his favorite bar. He had not gone far when he heard the sounds of soft crunching in the snow. He turned around to see his five year old son a few yards behind him. When he asked the boy what he was doing, the boy said, "I'm trying to follow in your footsteps dad". According to the story—the man never took another drink (see MacArthur's Commentary p. 106).

### Caution! Control What You Do (v.8)

*8 "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire.*

Jesus uses hyperbole—he exaggerates a statement to make a point. Does Jesus literally want you to cut off your hand or cut off your feet? Does this passage promote self-mutilation? I don't think so. Jesus means that we are to radically, dramatically, cut sin out of our lives.

Jesus invites the disciples to surgically cut out sin in their lives or anything that would cause them to abandon faith or trust in God or abandon faith or trust in Christ.

We know the temptation to sin comes from several sources; the world, the flesh, the devil. We also know that both hand and foot are the instruments we use to either 'handle' sin or 'travel' towards sin.

Earlier in the passage Jesus took a child and reminded the disciples the greatest in the Kingdom of God was the person with child-like faith, humility, trust. The truly humble person seeks to build others up, not tear them down. The humble person is a stepping stone not a stumbling stone. We are to build bridges to help people get safely to Jesus.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus already said (5:29) ". . .if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you". There Jesus dealt harshly with lust. Here Jesus deals just as harshly with **pride. Pride prevents humility.** People have read this passage and falsely thought—"My hand is my problem" or "my feet are my problem". "If I didn't have this hand I wouldn't sin or if I didn't have these feet I wouldn't sin!" **But that is not true. Sin is not in your hand or feet but in your heart. Jesus is not suggesting severing body parts. Rather self-examination which leads to self-revelation which leads to self-denial. Cutting off limbs can never change the spiritual condition of the human heart. Jesus is in effect saying, nothing is worth missing out on eternal life. Nothing is worth missing out eternal friendship and fellowship with God in Christ in Heaven. Nothing is worth risking eternity in Hell. There is no sacrifice too great in this life—if it means avoiding the punishment of God.**

### Caution! Control What You See (v.9)

*9 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.*

## **The King's Clear Warning**

### **Matthew 18:7-9**

The eye has been called the window to the soul—and the gateway to the heart. Here eye is a reference to vision or desire or ambition. Do blind people have to contend with sin?

The warning for Christians is to remove all stumbling blocks that cause sin!

Have you ever had a loved one diagnosed with breast cancer or bone cancer? Has one part of your body conspired against other parts of your body to do harm? Imagine you have to remove one part of the body to save the rest of your body!

We must be willing to cut away or remove those relationships or practices or activities that lead us to practice sin. Cutting off a limb or plucking out an eye might prove painful. Recognizing sin, dealing with sin, removing sin might prove painful. Will it take effort to stop drinking, or drugging or other equally harmful activities? It might be. But we must be willing to radically turn from our sin and radically turn to Christ.

The humble person lives for Jesus first, for others second and for self—last. The humble person is willing to deprive themselves if it makes Jesus happy.

Since Jesus uses hyperbole and metaphor to describe our dramatic dealings with sin—does Jesus use hyperbole or metaphor of being *cast into everlasting fire* (v.8) or *cast into hell fire* (v.9)?

Are we to assume 'hell fire' means a permanent place of everlasting torment?  
What is hell? Do people really go to a place called hell for sin?

We could spend a great deal of time on the topic of hell. But before the question of Hell can be answered we must turn our attention to the topic of sin.

### **How bad is sin—really?**

What did sin do? It brought catastrophic judgment on Lucifer—who becomes Satan. Hell was created for the Satan and his angels. Sin brought spiritual death on Adam and Eve and eventually physical death and then death to all men (Gen.5:5; Ps. 90:10). It brought disorder and pain to both humans and nature (Gen. 3:18; Rom.8:19-22). Sin serves as an object lesson to angels (1 Cor. 4:9; 1Tim.5:21; Gal. 3:19; 1 Peter 1:12; Heb.1:14).

When Christians sin it results in a loss of light (1John 1:6); a loss of joy (Ps.51:12); a loss of righteousness (1 John 3:4-10); a loss of love (1 John 2:5; 15-17; 4:12). Sin causes the Saint to experience a loss of fellowship (1 John 1:3; 6-7) and a loss of confidence (1 John 3:19-22) and a loss of health and sometimes even physical life (1 Cor.11:30).

But some of you don't believe me. Just like some of you won't believe me when I speak about hell. In brief hell is described as a place of unquenchable fire (Matt.3:12; 13:41-42; Mark 9:43);

## The King's Clear Warning

### Matthew 18:7-9

everlasting fire (v.8). It is a place of memory and remorse (Luke 16:19-21); a place of unending thirst (Luke 16:24); a place of misery and pain (Rev. 14:10-11) and a place of frustration and anger (Mark 13:42; 24:51) and a place of **eternal separation** (Rev.2:11; 20:6, 15). The Bible describes this place as a place of punishment where the recipient receives the indiluted—divine wrath. Habakuk 3:2; and Revelation 14:10.

It was originally prepared for Satan and his hosts (Matt.25:41). The sad and disturbing news is that it will exist always (Dan. 12:2; Matt. 25:46; Jude 7).

**A low view of sin will always result in a low view of hell.**

### Caution! Care For These Little Ones (vv.10-11)

*10“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*

Some people believe heaven is a metaphor. But Jesus believed Heaven was a real place. He called it “My Father’s house” (John 14:2). Jesus believed there are angels in Heaven who see (witness) the face of His Father who is in heaven.

In the ancient world it was believed that invisible guardians protected people. When Jesus says, their angels always see the face of My Father—it means they have direct access to God! **The angels see and watch and listen and obey God’s command in relationship to you—the believer! Angels never take their eyes off the LORD.** In ancient times only the most important people had direct access to the King. In our own culture a person is thought powerful when they have ‘access’ to the rich and the powerful. This verse supports the idea of guardian angels. The writer of Hebrews calls these ministering spirits (Heb.1:14).

Take heed means “be warned” or “pay attention”. Don’t despise one of these little ones (mentioned in vv.2-6). We are in danger when we neglect our relationships, we are in mortal danger when we despise one another. Remember—when we welcome each other—we welcome Christ Jesus (v.5). “The Father cares for them and angels watch over them” (Wiersbe p. 65). Jesus draws our attention to the fact that there is **no such thing as an unimportant child**. The child represents every believer. There is no such thing as an unimportant Christian (believer).

You might be tempted to think that the passage is limited to real life children. But you would not be going far enough. The passage is about all believers in Jesus. And if you are a believer in Jesus than this passage is about you.

The word ‘despise’ is interesting. **It means to look down on—or observe from a safe distance of the perception of personal or moral superiority. It means to look down on someone negatively. It means to look down on someone without consideration or care. It means to treat someone with contempt or as worthless.**

## The King's Clear Warning

### Matthew 18:7-9

Clearly the world sees Christians as worthless. The popular culture views the unborn as disposable—tissue—that can be hacked to pieces or who's parts might be sold for research or medical experiment. God loves and cares for all His children. We Christians run the risk of despising one another when we use our liberties to take advantage of one another. Another way we can despise one another is too withhold from one another when we have the opportunity to do good. **Another way we can despise one another is too ridicule one another about our physical appearance or fashion choices. This is exactly what the Corinthian believers did to Paul when they said, "his letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible" (2 Corinthians 10:10).** It was there way of saying, "You are a good teacher but you kind of look and sound like a geek".

The warning seems to mean that we can't safely ignore anyone. **Apparently God thinks they are very important.** In the 11th century there was a Duke named Robert of Burgundy. He was about to go off to war when he made all his barons and nobles swear allegiance to his infant son. One great baron came in with his clanging armor and great plume. He looked at Robert and then at the child and said, "The child is so little." "Yes" said the Duke, "he is little, but he'll grow." Indeed he did grow and became William the Conqueror of England. We cannot risk offending, neglecting, ignoring, or sinning against anyone! You never know who they will grow up to be!

*If for the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.*

Once again context is king. Conversion is the door of the Kingdom (v.3). We must turn around. We must turn from our former condition to the Lord Jesus Christ. We can no longer occupy the former place. This is much more than simply changing our mind or opinion or religious views. Doing good is evidence of our entry into that Kingdom (v.5). Continued offense (causing others to be tempted or sin) is evidence we are not in the Kingdom.

Some scholars suggest this verse does not appear in the original text. But the passage appears without dispute in Luke 19:10; ". . .for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Robert Gromacki in his excellent book *Salvation is Forever* lists the following reasons why human beings are lost:

They are lost because they reject the Biblical Revelation of God about God—(Rom.1:19-20)

"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse!"

They are lost because of disobeying their own conscience (Rom.2:14-16).

They are lost because of their relationship to Satan (John 8:42-44).

## **The King's Clear Warning**

### **Matthew 18:7-9**

They are lost because of their relationship to sin (Rom. 5:12; Eph. 4:18).

They are lost because of their relationship to God (John 3:36; 1 John 5:12 and Jude 19).

“These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit”.

My friend Jesus did come to seek and save that which was lost. Jesus is the source of salvation. Jesus is able to save. Jesus is willing to save. The writer of Hebrews says (5:9); “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him”.

## **Conclusion**