# **12** Hell Whole or Heaven Maimed

## The Three Passages

(42) And whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that **believe on me** to **stumble**, it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. (43) And if thy hand cause thee to stumble, cut it off: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. (44) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (45) And if thy foot cause thee to **stumble**, cut it off: it is **good for thee to** enter into life halt, rather than having thy two feet to be cast into hell. (46) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (47) And if thine eye cause thee to **stumble**, cast it out: it is good for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell; (48) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (Mark 9:42-48 ASV)

(29) And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that *one of thy members should perish*, and *not thy whole body be cast into hell*. (30) And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that *one of thy members should perish*, and *not thy whole body go into hell*. (Matt. 5:29-30 ASV)

(6) But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that **believe on me to stumble**, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea. (7) Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh! (8) And if thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to **stumble**, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed or halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. (9) And if thine eye causeth thee to **stumble**, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eves to be cast into the hell of fire. (Mat 18:6-9 ASV)

The literal meaning is clear. Jesus says a "believer in me" can "stumble." (Mark 9:42: Matt. 18:6.) Jesus repetitively tells "you" that if you stumble, you had better cut off the body part causing you to sin or you will go to hell. In its most succinct sense, this teaches 'heaven maimed or hell whole.'

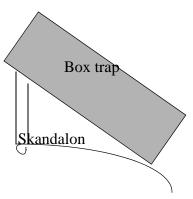
# In-Depth Exposition

If you violate the commandments, Jesus required "cutting off the body parts" that cause you to be "ensnared in sin" or you will be sent to hell. (Matthew 5:29, Matthew 18:8, and Mark 9:42-48.) You can go to "heaven maimed" or "hell whole." Jesus specifically said this principle applies to "believers in me who become ensnared (or stumble)." (Mark 9:42; Matt. 18:6.) Jesus described the steps needed as 'cutting off the body part ensnaring you to sin.'

What does this passage mean?

First, does "cutting off body parts" appear to mean more than merely *sorrow for sin?* 

Yet, for it appears that Jesus taught one needs to actually take urgent steps to destroy the object from which the temptation grows. Jesus is pointing to physical steps consistent with an ante-



cedent mental sorrow (repentance). Thus, Jesus insists that for "believers in me" who are "ensnared" that if they wish to go to heaven, they must do so actually "maimed." Clearly, in context, Jesus is not talking about merely changing your mind about sin (*i.e.*, sorrow for sin). Nor is Jesus talking about changing your mind about Himself — faith. Rather, Jesus is talking about taking active measures to *prevent sin* in the future.

What are these steps? Are they a species of works worthy of repentance? Is it successful obedience? Or is it literally separating from yourself the causes of temptation to make repeating sin impossible? We must search this out carefully. Jesus made your salvation absolutely indispensable on these steps: it is heaven maimed or hell whole. There is no third option for a "believer ensnared in sin" to go to heaven by faith alone. Thus, it is imperative to find Jesus' meaning for the good of our own souls.

If you have lived with the cheap grace gospel in your consciousness as long as I have (over twenty-five years), then I venture to say this chapter will do you the most good in this book. Why? Because Jesus is going to give you in these passages the medicine your soul needs so desperately to stay healthy and saved.

### The Skandalon

We will now quote the same passages you read at the outset. But this time, we will reveal the Greek verb *skandalizo* and the Greek noun *skandalon*. It is absolutely essential to note these words and their meaning to understand Jesus' meaning. So please read these verses one more time:

(42) And whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble (skandalizo), it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. (43) And if thy [your] hand cause thee to stumble (skandalizo), cut it off: it is good for thee [you] to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. (44) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (45) And if thy [your] foot cause thee [you] to stumble (**skandalizo**), cut it off: it is good for thee [you] to enter into life halt, rather than having thy two feet to be cast into hell. (46) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (47) And if thine [your] eve cause thee [you] to stumble (skandalizo), cast it out: it is good for thee [you] to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell; (48) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (Mar 9:42-48 ASV.)

### Jesus repeats this in Matthew. He says:

(7) Woe unto the world because of offences (*skandalon*, plural)! for it must needs be that offences (*skandalon*) come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! (8) Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend (*skandalizo*) thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two

feet to be cast into everlasting fire. (9) And if thine eye offend (*skandalizo*) thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. (Mat 18:7-9 ASV.)

### The Picture of A Box Trap Missing in English

To understand Jesus here it is useful to note that the Greek word translated as *stumble* is from the Greek verb *skandalizo*. Our English word *scandalized* comes from it. Its best translation here is *entrapped*. And when the passage in Matthew speaks of *offences*, it uses the plural of *skandalon*. It means here *snare*.

A *skandalon* in Greek literally meant the wooden stick that would hold up one edge of a metal box-trap. (See diagram on page 3.) Food would be put under the box. An animal would be tempted by the food to enter the trap. Then the hunter would position himself a significant distance away, hidden from view. The hunter would then use a small string that was holding the *skandalon* stick. The hunter would pull on the string, causing the *skandalon* stick to collapse. The box-trap would fall, and the animal's whole body would normally be trapped inside. The animal would be *skandlizo*-ed.

It is absolutely essential to understand the *skandalon* in order to understand Jesus' message. For sometimes an animal could escape the metal trap by letting a limb be ripped off. For example, if the trap fell on a tail. Or only on a leg. Or only on an arm. The animal would be trapped only partially. Before the hunter would run over, the animal would begin a desperate struggle for its life. By force of will, the animal would release itself from the trap by using its free limbs to pull away. In that process of pulling away, the animal would tear off the body part that was pinned under the metal trap. The animal would run away, maimed but still alive.

Jesus' reference to this hunting-picture is clear from the message quoted above. In verses 43 and 45 of Mark 9, Jesus says you should "cut off" the body part ensnaring yourself. The word He uses is the verb form of the noun *skandalon*. You should be like the animal that is ensnared (*skandalizo*-ed) by a single body part. Suffer the loss of a limb but live rather than hold onto the limb and be taken and killed by the hunter. The hunting imagery makes Jesus' meaning plain.

### The Picture of Salvation At Stake For "Scandalized" Believers Is Unmistakable

Jesus is very concerned about those "believers" in him who become "skandlizo-ed." (Mark 9:42; Matt. 18:6.) Rather than Jesus telling us no Christian believer can ever become *skandalizo*-ed, Jesus bewails those who "shall cause one of these little ones that *believe on me* to stumble...." *i.e.*, be *skandal izo*-ed. (Mark 9:42; Matt.18:6.)

What is the price that one of these "believers in me" must pay for being *skandalizo*-ed? Jesus repeats three times the price is *damnation*.

TABLE 1. The Price Of Being Entrapped (Skandalizo-ed)

SKANDALIZO-ED	RESULT
If thy hand cause thee to stumble, <i>i.e.</i> , be entrapped ( <i>skandalizo</i> -ed.)	[You with] thy two hands go into hell, into the <i>unquenchable fire</i> (43)
If thy foot causes thee to stumble, <i>i.e.</i> , be entrapped ( <i>skandalizo</i> -ed.)	[You] having thy two feet [are] cast into hell where their worm dieth not, and the <i>fire is not quenched</i> . (45-46)
If thy eye causes thee to stumble, <i>i.e.</i> , be entrapped ( <i>skandalizo</i> -ed.)	[You with] two eyes [are] cast into hell; where their worm dieth not, and the <i>fire is not quenched</i> . (47-48)

### How is One Saved In Jesus' Lesson?

Jesus could not be more clear that the price of salvation for the "believer in me" who has become "ensnared" (*skandalizo*-ed) is *stern measures* of the most severe sort.

TABLE 2. The Means of Entering Heaven In Mark 9:42-48

CONDITION	RESULT
[If] cut it off ( <i>i.e.</i> , hand causing you to be ensnared)	[You] enter into life maimed. (43)
[If] cut it off ( <i>i.e.</i> , foot causing you to be ensnared)	[You] enter into life halt (45)
[If] cast it out ( <i>i.e.</i> , eye causing you to be ensnared)	[You] enter into the kingdom of God with one eye (47)

### What Are These Stern Measures

### The Stern Measure Given The Young Rich Man

In Jesus' answer to the young rich man's question on how to have eternal life, Jesus first tells the young man to "obey the law." (Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.)

Then, when the young man says he has obeyed it, Jesus next gives the young man a heaven-maimed command:

Jesus said unto him, If thou wouldest be perfect (*teleios*, mature), **go**, **sell that which thou hast**, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. (Mat 19:21 ASV.)

There is no command in Scripture that one is not permitted to have wealth. But Jesus is insisting that this particular man give *all* his wealth to the poor. Why? Jesus' word choice indicates that this is how this particular young man will reach a full mature and perfect state.

Isn't this a stern measure? The man was very wealthy, the text says. What kind of problems does wealth by itself cause, even if obtained legitimately?

Jesus once said:

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and *mammon*. (Mat 6:24 ASV)

Jesus in Revelation speaks similarly, saying that riches blocked the productivity of the church members at Laodicea.

(16) So because thou art *lukewarm*, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth. (17) Because thou sayest, *I am rich*, and *have gotten riches*, and have *need of nothing*; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: (Rev. 3:16-17 ASV.)

Jesus in the Parable of the Sower speaks similarly of the third seed. Its productivity is blocked by riches. Let's do a brief review of the Parable of the Sower on this issue.

In that parable, the first seed rejects the word and never believes. (Luke 8:12.) The second seed "believes for a while" but then falls into temptation and withers (dies). (Luke 8:13.) The third seed goes much farther in growth, but then is choked by thorns. Jesus tells us what are those thorns:

And that which fell among the thorns, these are they that have heard, and as they go on their way they are *choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life*, and bring no fruit to perfection. (Luke 8:14 ASV.)

Thus, repeatedly, Jesus says that riches can block productivity. Riches become thorns and hence a snare. The root problem is riches become one's priority, not the Lord.

How do these passages help us understand the heaven-maimed or hell-whole statement?

Because Jesus evidently is giving the young rich man a cure that will *prevent his serving his mammon any longer*. By giving away all his wealth to the poor, and becoming poor himself, the young man will *put an end to the source of his temptation*. The rich man if turned poor can now become rich toward God.

In this example from Jesus' ministry, the physical object that needed to be destroyed was the wealth itself. Riches allowed the young rich man to forget God. The young man has sacrificed productivity to God in *good works* because they often cost money to do. Thus, the young rich man may think he has not transgressed any commands among the Ten Commandments. But the affirmative commands of charity and good works were being ignored. Productivity in good works are being sacrificed to the god mammon that the young man loved.

Thus, heaven maimed for this young man meant *cutting off his connection to his accumulated wealth*. Starting over will give him a new outlook where God's works are his goals, not serving mammon.

# What Eunuchs Can Teach Us About Jesus' Meaning

In Jesus' day, there was one kind of person who cut off a body part often to preclude succumbing to beguiling temptation. This was the eunuch. Bluntly, a eunuch means a castrated man, *i.e.*, one whose testes are removed.

What is the background on eunuchs in Jesus' day? It may surprise one to know but eunuchs were highly regarded in that era. Their class reflected a venerable condition. Many societies gave only eunuchs important public functions.

The Wikipedia explains the history of eunuchs:

A eunuch is a castrated man; the term usually refers to those castrated in order to perform a

specific social function, as was common in many societies of the past. The earliest records for intentional castration to produce eunuchs are from the Sumerian cities of Lagash in the 21st century BC. Over the millennia since, they have performed a wide variety of functions in many different cultures such as courtiers or equivalent domestics, treble singers, religious specialists, government officials, military commanders, and *guardians of women or harem servants*. In some societies, the notion of eunuch has been expanded to include men who are impotent with women or are simply celibate.<sup>1</sup>

It is notable that those who guarded women for others were willing to castrate themselves. Then the women would have no fear of transgression. It is for similar reasons that the Greek writer Xenophon said eunuchs were in high regard for their exceptional trustworthiness.

The *Wikipedia* gives an example from Roman times. The eunuch was looked upon with high favor.

In late Rome, emperors such as Constantine were surrounded by eunuchs for such functions as bathing, hair cutting, dressing, and bureaucratic functions, in effect acting as a shield between the emperor and his administrators from physical contact. *Eunuchs were believed loyal and dispensable*.

In the early Christian church, many men had themselves castrated for religious reasons. As *Wikipedia* explains:

The practice continued throughout Christian times, with many of the early church castrating themselves as an act of devotion.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eunuch (last accessed 4-21-07).

In the Byzantium church, the term eunuch was extended to those who also refused to have a family. It extended the term eunuch to

a wide range of men with comparable behaviour, who had "chosen to withdraw from worldly activities and thus refused to procreate."

Origen, an early Church writer, found support in Matthew 19:10-12. There Jesus says:

(10). His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. (11) But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. (12) For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. (Mat 19:10-12 KJV)

In Greek, the literal expression "made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" reads: "eunuchs who emasculate themselves because of (*dia*) the kingdom of heaven."

In the larger context, Jesus is explaining this antidivorce command. The disciples then say these problems are avoided by not marrying. They asked if Jesus meant it would be better not to marry than deal with these issues. Then Jesus addresses the question whether it is "good not to marry." Jesus says only those to whom "it is given" can receive this saying, *i.e.*, "not to marry." (v. 11.) He that "is able to receive

<sup>2.</sup> The citation here is to J. David Hester, "Eunuchs and the Postgender Jesus: Matthew 19:12 and Transgressive Sexualities," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* Vol. 28, No. 1, 13-40 (2005).

it, let him receive it." (v. 12.)<sup>3</sup> Jesus meant celibacy (shunning marriage) is not for everyone. Only those who have the gift of celibacy can receive it.

Jesus then in passing on that question makes mention that some make themselves eunuchs "for the kingdom of heaven's sake." This was only in passing because the question under consideration was broader: whether it is good *not* to marry. Thus, Jesus' discussion of the gift some receive was only talking of the gift of an ability *not to marry*. It is not a comment on there being a gift that some can become *eunuch's* for the *kingdom of heaven's sake*.

Instead, we should see the reference to eunuchs who "have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake" is a statement all by itself. It was mentioned in passing on another point. So what does this expression mean?

### **Eunuch's For the Sake of the Kingdom**

Origen in the early church around 250 A.D. took this expression about the eunuch metaphorically. He thought it elevated celibacy. However, the part of the discussion that involved celibacy was Jesus' discussion of the gift of *not getting married* which Jesus said was not for everyone. Celibacy was only for those who received the gift who were prepared to receive it.

<sup>3.</sup> This means that the command to Adam, Noah and Jacob to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28; 9:1; 28:3) was not an injunction universally on every man. Such a universal reading assumes too much. Then what of the opposite issue presented by Deuteronomy 23:1: "He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the assembly of Jehovah." This means literally what it says. It does not tell us that castration which is removal of the testes is frowned upon. However, some scholars read this verse to mean castration is prohibited under Jewish law. (Harvey.) However, this is not what the verse says. It speaks of wounded stones. Not removed testes. To the contrary, eunuchs are spoken highly about in Isaiah 56:3-5. It says obedient eunuchs will have a better memorial and name for posterity than if they had had children.

When Jesus was talking about the eunuchs, however, Jesus was not talking any longer about celibacy. Jesus there likely meant literally the act of self-castration. Some would do this measure because it was an effective means by which one could gain sexual self-control. This is what Jesus means that some did this for "sake of the kingdom," *i.e.*, to gain it.

Thus, when discussing eunuchs, Jesus meant precisely what He literally said. Some become castrated for the sake of the kingdom, *i.e.*, they cut off the body part that will cause them to sin so as to prevent losing the kingdom. Jesus was talking about self-control by a physical cutting-off of a body part for the "kingdom of heaven's sake."

A.E. Harvey of Oxford University provides other first century examples of what physical-mutilation was intended to accomplish in the first century based on contemporaneous writings — Philo — the Jewish philosopher.

### How Philo's Remarks Help Elucidate Jesus' Meaning

Harvey explains:

Philo tells the story of a man under torture who bites off his own tongue rather than betrav precious information, and then goes on: 'it is better to be castrated' (eu uwi zein the same word as in the gospel saying) 'than to lust madly after illicit unions'. Later he develops the point: 'Need I then go on to remind you of the multitude of those who have been ruined by the stream that there is no stopping, flowing from an unbridled tongue, or by the **deadly** stimulus to sexual sins which accompanies ungoverned lust? ... Those who are not utterly uneducated would choose to be *blinded rather* than see unfitting things, to have their tongues cut out rather than utter things which should not be spoken' - and in case this **sounds impossibly demanding** he refers back to the case already given of *the man biting off* his tongue under torture. (A. E. Harvey

(Oxford University), "Eunuchs for the Sake of the Kingdom," *Heythrop Journal XLVIII* (2007), 1–17, at 5.)

### **Self-Inflicted Mutilation versus Self-Control**

Origen later thought it was mistaken to take Jesus literally on self-mutilation for the kingdom's sake. Harvey explains:

Origen himself came to see... a mistaken literalism in interpreting these words of Philo (along with two sentences of Sextus of similar import and the words of *Jesus on self-inflicted impotence*). [Origin believed] [f]or it was not self-mutilation that the philosophers were interested in. It was *the training of the will*. We can complete Philo's exhortation accordingly. It is better to be castrated than to lust madly after illicit unions; but *better still to achieve such mastery of the passions that no such drastic act is required*. The prize was the virtue of self-control, which was valued as much among Hellenized Jews as among pagans....

There is some truth in Origen's deduction. How much better not to need urgent steps of physical mutilation to prevent sin. Yet, Jesus was precisely pitting that as *the final option* if you could not get mental mastery. Jesus was insisting upon successful self-control. In a simple word: Jesus was demanding, for salvation-sake, that a "believer entrapped (*skandalizo*)" must cut this sin off by a *successful obedience* in addition to regret about sin.

### **Harvey Says The Meaning Is Obvious**

A.E.Harvey of Oxford says the meaning of Jesus is obvious. The eunuchs who become eunuch's do so for religious reasons.

We are having our attention drawn to the fact that some people actually are eunuchs, and of these some have even deliberately made eunuchs of themselves. Who then are these people? To any student of the ancient world who has not been influenced by the traditional Christian interpretation of the saying, the answer should be fairly obvious. There were indeed men who *castrated themselves for the sake of a religious vocation*. (*Id.* at 9-10.)

More accurately, these men castrated themselves to make sure they stay true to their vocation. They kill their sexual desire and hence do not commit sexual sins.

This then helps us understand the heaven-maimed or hell-whole statement. Some persons in Jesus' day actually were cutting off body parts to prevent sin. Jesus mentions one time such a person: eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God's sake.

### **Literal or Metaphorical Self-Mutilation?**

The history lesson about eunuchs tells us that we cannot claim Jesus could not have had a literal meaning when he said to cut off the body part ensnaring you in sin. (Mark 9:42-47.)

Instead, what we can say is this literal mutilation Jesus repeats three times was the final option. It may be necessary to go that far to satisfy Jesus' demands which give you only two narrow choices: heaven-maimed or hell-whole. To turn this injunction of Jesus into solely a metaphor for repentance-from-sin would be to take away what Jesus said are your stark choices. No one wants to loose an eye. An arm. A leg. Jesus says that *if this is what it takes to break free from sin, gouge it out or cut if off.* 

Obviously, however, because *no rational person* wants to do that, then Jesus would accept nothing less than successful self-control (successful obedience). This is the only other way to keep your eyes, arms or legs if they are

causing you to sin. No matter how precious those limbs or functions, they are worthless if you end up in hell. Hence, successful *obedience* is crucial to enter heaven. Thus, if you take Jesus seriously, you will exercise the self-control necessary to never have to do any of the physical mutilation that is your only other alternative to enter heaven — albeit maimed.

## Destroying Pagan Altars Destroys An Object So As To Prevent Sin

Another example of cutting out things that can cause sin is God's command against permitting pagan altars to even exist. Exodus 34:13-16.<sup>4</sup>

The reason given for this command was that pagan altars can cause one to eat meat sacrificed to idols. If pagan altars are destroyed, as God commands, then eating such meat is no longer possible.

What is the consequence of not obeying this command to destroy the pagan altars? God says you risk "one call thee [to eat with him] and thou eat of his sacrifice." (*Id.*) This means you might unknowingly eat such meat because the home you visit purchases such meat in the marketplace.

Jesus specifically said that eating such idol meat is wrong. (Rev. 2:14.) He said, in fact, it is a "snare" using the Greek word *skandalon*. (*Id.*)

Thus, in the first century A.D., destroying pagan altars would cut off the cause of your eating inadvertently idol meat at a Gentile home. If you do not cut that possibility

<sup>4.</sup> Exodus 34:13 says Jews were to tear down the altars of the Gentiles rather than make a covenant (*i.e.*, a peace treaty). In Exo 34:15-16, God says if you prefer making a covenant and allow their pagan altars, you risk "one call thee [to eat with him] and thou eat of his sacrifice." The command to destroy the pagan altars was so that Jews would avoid eating meat sacrificed to idols even *inadvertently at a meal at a Gentile home*. Hence, to prevent *unknowing* eating of such meat, God commands the destruction of pagan altars.

#### Conclusion

off, you risk become "ensnared" -- *scandalizo* 'd. This exactly parallels therefore Jesus' warning to believers to cut off the body parts ensnaring (*scandalizo*-ing) them or go to hell whole. (Matt. 9:42-47.)

Consequently, in this Exodus command, we see God's principle of *cutting off the root cause of a sin problem*. If it is a pagan altar, God insists upon the destruction of their pagan altars. This issue of idol meat may no longer be a problem today, but this law illustrates God's principle of *cut it off* to avoid sin that can cause you — a believer — to go to hell.

### Conclusion

Jesus' hell-whole or heaven maimed warning is in stark contrast to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Jesus says unless you buffet your body to avoid sinning you will later be rejected. (Mark 9:42-48.) A Christian believer who is ensnared has only two choices: heaven maimed or hell whole. There is no compromising idea that faith or some initial obedience is all that matters. Jesus demands *success*. The price of heaven is precisely success in avoiding sin. You must take whatever measures that achieve this or you will suffer hell forever.

Hell Whole or Heaven Maimed