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If Anyone Causes One of These Little Ones to Stumble
Matthew 18:6-14; Mark 9:38-50; Luke 9:49-50

If anyone causes one of these little ones to stumble DIG: What is ironic about Mark 9:38-41? What does it mean to do something "in Jesus' name?" Why is causing a child to sin such a serious offense? Although evil is inevitable, how are we still responsible to care for others' spiritual welfare? What does Messiah's parable in Matthew 18:12-14 teach about God's attitude toward little ones? Toward wandering sheep? What four things does the Lord say would be better? What is His point in using this figurative language?

REFLECT: When was the last time you gave a cup of cold water to someone in need? Where will your reward be? What might be an area in your life that causes problems for others? What will you do about it? When have you felt like the sheep that wandered off? How did God get you back? What needs to change in your attitude toward those who wander? Toward the weak? The powerless?

In the previous file, the lesson was to *be childlike*; the lesson in this file is *receive those who are childlike.* After being rebuked about claiming to be the greatest, the disciples try to change the subject. But the problem was the same, the problem of status. The previous section dealt with the status within the disciples themselves, but this section deals with the status of the disciples in relationship to others.

"Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us" (Mark 9:38: Luke 9:49). This is a clear example of pride. **He is not one of us**, meaning **not** part of **the twelve apostles**. This **someone** they were referring to may have been a disciple of John the Baptist, who by faith had come to **Christ**. But, **he** was not a member of **the inner circle**! What irked **the talmidim** was even though this disciple of John's **was not one** of **them**, **he** was being successful at it! And what made matters even worse was that nine of **them** doubtless remembered **their** own

failure in that regard (**to see link click Gd – Jesus Heals a Demon Possessed Boy**).

Once again **Messiah** rebukes them. **Do not stop him, Jesus said. For no one who does a miracle in My name can in the next moment say anything bad about Me (Mark 9:39), for whoever is not against us is for us (Mark 9:40; Luke 9:50).** If one is working for **Yeshua**, **in His name (Mark 9:38)**, that person cannot work **against Him** at the same time. Not only that, **He** tells them that anyone can accomplish great things for **God** without being one of **the twelve apostles**. If the messianic movement is to grow, others needed to be included outside **the** original **Twelve**. Then **the Master** gives a concrete example of the principle just stated above. **Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in My name because you belong to Me will certainly not lose their reward (Mark 9:41).** To **give a cup of water** to one of **Messiah's** followers is the same as giving it to **Christ Himself**. Even the most humble works will be rewarded, it is not necessary to do miracles.

Next **Yeshua** presents the negative side of the same truth: When a person mistreats a believer that person mistreats **the Lord**. Then **He** gives a concrete example: **Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for them to have a heavy millstone hung around their neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42 NASB)! To stumble** (Greek: *skandalizo*) literally means *to cause to fall*, and **Christ** is therefore speaking of *enticing, trapping, or influencing* believers in any way that would cause them to sin or makes it easier for them to sin. The phrase **these little ones who believe in Me,** makes it clear that **He** has in mind the **children** mentioned in the context of **Matthew 18:3-5**. This strong illustration would have shocked the crowd. **A millstone** was the heavy round stone usually pulled by beast of burden in order to pulverize grain into flour – so large as to require brute-strength to turn it. There is no evidence to show that the Jews ever practiced this mode of punishment. It was, however, used by the ancient Syrians, the Romans, the Macedonians and the Greeks. It was inflicted on the worst of the worst, especially on parricides and blasphemers.[901]

Unfortunately, **the world** has always made those **stumble** that would seek such child-like faith. So **Yeshua** uses another illustration to bring home **His** point. **Woe to the world because of snares! For there must be snares, but woe to the person who sets the snare (Matthew 18:7 CJB)! A snare** was a trap or cage that was set in order to capture an animal. Jewish dietary restrictions would not

allow eating any animal that is not properly slaughtered to remove the blood. Therefore, you could not hunt or shoot a kosher animal. The only way to capture a kosher animal was by the use of **a snare**. While digging a pit or setting a baited cage to catch the animal was an accepted practice, it was also a picture of doing something deceitful. The world is filled with such **snares** and traps! **Jesus** even affirmed here that **there must be snares**. Maybe we can survive the direct arrows and shots, but we must watch out for the hidden **snares**.

Then **Jesus** uses hyperbole to emphasize **His** point. **So if your hand or foot becomes a snare for you, cut it off and throw it away! Better that you should be maimed or crippled and obtain eternal life then keep both hands and both feet and be thrown into everlasting fire (Matthew 18:8; Mark 9:43 CJB)! The Lord** is obviously speaking figuratively, because no part of our physical bodies causes us to sin, and removing any part of it would not keep us from sinning. The point was that a person should do whatever is necessary, no matter how extreme and painful it might be, to keep from sinning or keep from causing others to sin. Any habit, situation, relationship, or anything else that **becomes a snare for you** should be permanently given up. Nothing is worth keeping if it leads to sin in any way. However, the implication here is that there is overcoming grace available for victory over temptation and sin.[902]

But **eternal life** is so important that **if your foot makes you sin, cut it off! Better that you should be lame but obtain eternal life** (see **Ms – The Eternal Security of the Believer**)**, rather than keep both feet and be thrown into Gei-Hinnom (Mark 9:45 CJB).** This was the area outside of Jerusalem that was notorious as an area of paganism and idolatry. During the time of **Christ** it was used as a garbage dump. It was constantly burning with the smell of sulfur, refuse and dead bodies. If a body was not claimed, it was thrown into the fires of **Gei-Hinnom**. The Greeks later translated the Hebrew term to **Gehenna**, which evolved to the English word **hell**. It is easy to see how the world **Gei-Hinnom** became synonymous with a most wicked place and even the future place of the judgment of the ungodly **(Jeremiah 7; Matthew 7)**.[903]

Similarly, **it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell, where the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched (Mt 18:9; Mk 9:47-48). Isaiah** teaches the existence of a **new heaven and a new earth** (confirmed in **2 Peter 3:13** and **Revelation 21-22)** in which **God's people will go out and look on the dead bodies of those who rebelled against the LORD; the worms**

that eat them will not die, the fire that burns them will not be quenched (Isaiah 66:24). When physical **bodies** are buried and begin to decay, **the worms** can attack **them** only as long as the flesh lasts. Once devoured, **the body** can experience no more harm. But, the resurrected bodies of the damned will never be consumed, and **the** hellish **worms** that feed on **them** will likewise never die.[904]

Therefore, the Bible does not teach annihilationism, which maintains that lost souls will simply cease to exist into nothingness. Those who believe in annihilationism maintain that no one deserves endless suffering. The problem with annihilationism is that it contradicts the teaching of the Bible. Several passages assert the endlessness of the punishment of the wicked. Both Covenants refer to unending or unquenchable fire **(Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:43-48).** In addition, there are several passages where words like **everlasting, eternal** and **forever** are applied to nouns designating the future state of the wicked **(Isaiah 33:14; Dani'el 12:2; Matthew 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9; Jude 6; Revelation 14:11, 20:10)**. The parallelism found in **Matthew 25:46** is particularly noteworthy: **If the one** (life) **is of unending duration, then the other** (punishment) **must be also.**[905]

The lessons from these verses are clear. **Eternal life** is so fantastic – do all within your powers to find it; however, **Gehenna** is so terrible – do all within your powers to avoid it. As horrible as removing limbs or an **eye** might be, spiritual repentance and a change of heart is what's really needed **to wait for God's Son Yeshua, whom He raised from the dead, to appear from heaven and rescue us from the impending fury of God's judgment (First Thessalonians 1:10 CJB).**

See that you never despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven are continually seeing the face of my Father in heaven (Matthew 18:10 CJB). The phrase: **For I tell you,** is emphatic, pointing out the importance of what **the Lord** is about to say. A special judgment is reserved for the ones who set **the snare**. No doubt this is all a sober statement of the special place **children** have in the eyes of **God**. Everyone is judged according to the light they possess, and **children** appear to be less responsible based on their simple trust. The implication is that the holy **angels in heaven** never take **their** eyes off **ADONAI** lest they miss some direction from **Him** regarding a task they are to perform on behalf of **His little ones**.

The Bible does not teach that believers have a guardian angel, **as Jewish tradition** in **Yeshua's** day **taught** and as many people still believe and teach today. **The apostles**, praying for **Kefa** after **he** was miraculously released from prison, thought

that the knock on **their** door was that of **his angel (Acts 12:15)**. But, that superstitious belief is merely reflected in **Acts**. It is neither taught nor substantiated here or anywhere else in Scripture.

The Holy Spirit speaks of **children** and **their angels** in a collective sense. These **angels**, whether a distinct group or the whole body of **angels**, are responsible for the care of **God's little ones, who believe in His Son (Matthew 18:6)**. The fact that **El Shaddai** is so concerned about the care of **His children** that **He** has **His angels** ready to defend **them** at a moment's notice shows how valuable **they** are to **Him**.

Mark adds something about **salt** when he says: **Indeed, everyone is going to be salted with fire. Salt is excellent, but if it loses its saltiness, how will you season it? So have salt in yourselves – that is, be at peace with each other (Mark 9:49-50 CJB). Salt** is used to **season** and as a preservative producing permanence **(Matthew 5:13-14)**. Moshe wrote: **If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to ADONAI, you are to bring as the grain offering from your first fruits kernels of grain from fresh ears, dry-roasted with fire (Leviticus 2:13 CJB).** Hence it is appropriate for **the talmidim**, to whom **Jesus** was speaking, to be living sacrifices themselves **(Romans 12:1-2)**, and **to be salted with fire.** Observant Jews sprinkle salt on bread before reciting the *b'rakhah* over it **(Mattityahu 14:19)**; this follows from the rabbinic equating of the home dining table with the Temple altar **(Mark 7:2-4; Luke 14:34-35)**.[906]

The rabbis taught six things about salt that could be applied to the apostles here. **First, they taught that the world could not survive without salt; secondly, salt was a necessity of life in the ancient world because it protected from spoiling and was used as a preservative; thirdly, it is generally true that salt does not lose its saltiness.** Because of that, some people have a problem with **Mark 9:50** because it was used for the sacrifices of the second Temple period. **Jesus** says: **Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? However, that salt was taken from the Dead Sea and it could become insipid and lose its saltiness; fourthly,** the disciples themselves can **lose their salt-like quality and slip into the thinking of the world; fifthly, salt is a distinctive mark of the talmid, the loss of which will make him or her worthless as far as usefulness to ADONAI; and lastly, they are to retain their salt-like quality and be at peace among themselves.**

In order to demonstrate the importance that **God** attaches to **little children**, **Jesus** gave **His apostles** the parable of the lost **sheep**. **What do you think?** was a common phrase used by teachers to get their students to ponder carefully about what was being taught. In **His** hypothetical story, **Jesus** asked: **If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off (Matthew 18:12)?** The idea seems implied that **the shepherd** knew **his** flock so well that **he** sensed **the wandering sheep** without having to check the entire flock. **The shepherd** knew each **sheep** individually **(John 10:1-18)**, and therefore knew instinctively when something was wrong or one of **them** was missing. **He** would not give up until **he** had found and rescued any lost **sheep**. **The** loyal **shepherd** would fight off wolves, bears, lions, thieves, or any other threat to **his sheep**. When a wandering **sheep** was found, **the shepherd** would pour olive oil over any wounds and bind up a broken leg. Then **he** would tenderly place **the sheep** on **his** shoulders and carry **it** back to the fold.

If a human shepherd can show so much concern for each **sheep** under his care, how much more does **Yeshua ha-Mashiach**, **the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant (Hebrews 13:20)**, care when **one of His people** spiritually **wonders off**? **And if He finds it** restores **it** to **Himself, He is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off (Matthew 18:13).**

On another occasion, **Jesus** used the same parable to teach **God’s** concern for unbelievers. **I tell you, He** explained, **that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine** self-righteous **people who do not** think they need **to repent (Luke 15:7).** There is a special joy expressed for the sheep that is found not because it is more valued or loved than the others but because its danger, hardship, and great need produce a special concern from the caring **shepherd**. In the same way, when one child in a

family is ill, especially if the child is seriously ill, the mother will devote much more time and attention to him or her than to the other children. And when that child finally gets well, she doesn’t rejoice for the children who have been healthy all along but for the one who was sick and suffering. And if the siblings are loving also, they will rejoice as well at the restoration of their brother or sister. Since **the Lord** has such tender compassion for all **His** children, and that their well-being brings **Him** great joy, we should find ourselves in holy fear of ever looking down on believers whose halo has slipped.

In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish (Matthew 18:14). Although **perish** (Greek: *apollumi*) normally carries the ideal of total destruction or even death, it sometimes, as here, refers to *ruin* or *loss* that is not permanent. In **Romans 14:15** the word parallels *lupeo,* which means to cause pain or grief: **For if because of food your brother is hurt** (*lupeo*)**, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy** (*apollumi*) **him with your food for whom Christ died.** When **Jesus** speaks of **perishing**, **He** relates it to sanctification, or our spiritual growth as believers over the course of our lives. **Christ** doesn’t want us to be spiritually wounded, even for a little while. When we fall into sin it destroys our usefulness to **Him**, to the Church, and it weakens our right relationship with **Him** and other believers. For one believer to wound another believer is to attack the will of **ADONAI** and oppose **Him**. **The Lord** actively seeks the spiritual well-being of all **His** children, and we should do no less.[907]