

Matthew 18:7–9

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Preacher: Joe Pace

[0 : 0 0] Scripture text is Matthew 18, 7 to 9. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Woe to the world for temptations to sin, for it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes. And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated.

Well, good morning. Let me add my word of welcome to you this morning. So glad that you're here with us this morning. We are in the sixth of 15 lessons within the book of Matthew that we've called following Jesus as King lessons learned along the way this morning. This lesson is simply entitled fight the power.

Fight the power. Yield not to temptation for yielding is sin.

Each victory will help you some other to win. fight manfully onward. Dark passions subdue. Look ever to Jesus. He will carry you through.

This is the first verse of the classic hymn, yield not to temptation. It was written by Horatio Palmer in 1868 right here in Chicago. This hymn is unusual and distinctive in that it doesn't merely reflect on general themes of God's love, grace, mercy, salvation, or even a call to worship as many hymns do, but rather it deals with man's behavior, man's struggle, and a direct admonition to resist temptation and sin.

[2 : 4 6] Brother Horatio's inspiration for this hymn comes merely from his personal struggle and realization of this immutable fact.

Sin is deadly and sin is dangerous. It's been said that sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.

And as such, here it is, really the main point of our text this morning. You have to do everything you can, anything you can, whatever it takes, whatever it costs to stay away from sin.

God takes sin seriously, and so should we. You've got to fight the power. Now I know, I know, let me just just breathe.

I know some of you are already processing in your mind, wait a minute, this is not sounding like one of those warm and fuzzy sermons this morning, and full disclosure, it probably isn't.

[4 : 1 4] Next week, Pastor Bing is going to be talking about the shepherd who leaves the 99 to go rescue the one. Praise God.

But today, sin. Just like a parent encourages their children to eat their vegetables so that they can grow up to be big and strong, our text provides us a critical lesson in how to be strong, mature followers of Jesus Christ by avoiding sin.

So crucial, so important is this lesson that Jesus will use in this passage some of the most extreme examples possible to get our attention and to get the point across.

You've got to fight. Fight. the power. Now, before I get too far down the road, let me pull over to the side and make sure everybody's in the car with me with their seatbelts fastened.

Let me do this by first defining sin. Sin represents all those things we do and say that are in direct opposition to what God wants.

[5 : 39] it is literally missing the mark. His mark. It's breaking God's law.

It's doing wrong instead of right. It's being bad instead of good. It's knowing what you're supposed to do and purposely doing the opposite.

And it's something we're all guilty of. it's something we all struggle with. And it's something we were all born into.

It's our nature. no parent pulls their child to the side and says look son I really really need for you to learn how not to do anything I tell you.

Let me show you how to be disobedient misbehave get into stuff you're not supposed to get into don't ever share with others never clean your room and for goodness sake lie lie lie to me as often as you can.

[6 : 55] No. We are born into it. And if you're one in this room who perhaps doesn't know Jesus as your personal savior and feels that you're all by yourself in this struggle against sin know that you are not.

You are in good company. Like I said earlier the Bible teaches that we were all born into it Psalm 51.

The only difference is that there are those in this room who have decided to be born again and follow Jesus and you can do the same thing today.

John Newton once said I remember just two things that I am a great sinner and Christ is a great savior. Now our text begins in verse seven but to provide the proper one way we need to really back up to verse six starting at verse six through verse nine we see repeatedly this Greek term scandalon that you've heard referenced over the past couple of weeks that simply means to be a stumbling block an offense a trigger a trap an impediment that is placed in the way that leads someone to fall someone to sin let me show it to you here we see it in each of these four verses in verse six it's the phrase who causes one of these little one to believe in me to sin in verse seven woe to the one by whom the temptation comes in verses eight and nine the same phrase appears causes you to sin the same

Greek word is really used in two different contexts leading us to make just these two observations this morning first you've got to fight those things from you that will cause others to sin secondly you've got to fight those things in you that will cause you to sin from you external in you internal all causing stumble and sin now some inside information if you get number two right it'll help you with number one fight those things from you in verses six and seven Jesus discusses those who would cause others to stumble or sin those who would offend set up trap trip entice incite or otherwise encourage others to fall the legal scholars legal students in this room would tell you that you don't have to physically commit the crime to be found guilty of the crime you can be deemed complicit in the crime and still be severely punished

[10 : 35] Jesus is saying in these verses if I find that you are in any way complicit in causing one of my little ones to fall then severe judgment is coming your way people he starts in verse six by using the first of these extreme examples to make his point you heard pastor helm mention it last week he says it would be better for a millstone to be hung around your neck and be drowned into the depths of the sea if I was using 1920s Chicago gangster slang I'd say you'd be better off with cement shoes or Chicago overcoat they used to call it that was the term they used as the method of taking a victim and placing them in concrete and dropping them in a body of water so you'd never find the body so devastating so diabolical is sin that this horrible treatment would be preferable than to cause one of his children to stumble and fall into it he expands on this in verse seven woe to the world for temptations to sin for it is necessary that temptations come but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes

Jesus is basically saying look I know you live in a fallen world and as such the temptation to sin is everywhere and it's expected the text says they're even at times necessary inevitable frankly it's often through these temptations that we find out what we're made of that we build up our faith and our endurance without temptation you'd never even know that you truly have the free will God has given you you can choose but as prevalent and pervasive as temptation is in our society and it is Jesus says you better not be the one bringing the temptation bringing the offense and if you do woe or judgment be upon you now there's also a word of encouragement to be found right here especially for those of you who've been hurt or offended you don't have to hold on to that anger and that bitterness for what someone has done to you

God himself has promised right here that he will deal with those by whom the offense comes growing up my parents would acknowledge the fact that I may witness fights at school further though it was the last thing they would want they even left room for the possibility that I may at some point actually end up in a fight but the only thing worse for them than me being in a fight was to find out that I was the one who started the fight when my dad would get to school to pick me up from the principal's office he would say well I sure hope you won that fight because the second fight you're going to have when you get home you're definitely going to lose what am I saying you may not be able to avoid the fight of temptation that will surely come your way but you shouldn't be starting that fight for someone else so how does this happen how can one cause another to stumble let me just give you a few ways first it can happen by false teaching or false doctrine leading someone down a path that is scripturally in error giving people your opinion and what you think instead of what the word says it can happen by provoking others to anger this is where offense usually comes in you know you know those ones that like to pick fights and push buttons they don't just inadvertently step on toes they look for creative ways to step on toes to get a reaction you can cause someone to stumble by refusing to correct them you go along to get along and instead of speaking the truth in love confrontation there's cover up or you see them about to go off a cliff and you say nothing you could set a sinful example not realizing that someone is watching you and people are always wanting to follow in your footsteps people see you do it and they assume that it must be okay for them to do it it's the parent who says do as I say not as I do and lastly of course there's actually involving them in some wrongdoing it's direct temptation that could be as simple as gossip or grumbling or complaining escalating to even more overt sinful acts it's literally encouraging someone to do what is wrong did you know that 75% of adolescents who tried drugs for the first time say they did it because someone talked them into it misery loves company and so does sin sin is always looking for a dance partner you just need to make sure it's not at your party what's important here to remember is that we are responsible

not only for our own sins but for our part in causing others to sin as well we are called to build one another up not tear one another down we're called to be stepping stones for one another not stumbling blocks be careful and fight the power now fight those things in you now in verses eight and nine Jesus makes it personal and turns to the internal by again using the most extreme of examples to make his point that we need to do whatever we can to avoid sin verse eight if your hand or foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away verse nine if your eye causes you to sin tear it out and throw it away look it would be better for you to be crippled lame and blind in one eye and make it to heaven than to have all your extremities and be thrown into hell wow now to be clear

Jesus is not saying that you should actually start lopping off limbs to avoid sin he is not advocating self harm your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and God doesn't want you to harm yourself Jesus is obviously using hyperbole here exaggerated or extravagant comments to make his point he often uses hyperbole in his teachings as a matter of fact you'll find almost the same verbiage used back in chapter five in the sermon on the mount pertaining!

[19 : 24] to lust he's trying to emphasize a critical point simply put Jesus is saying that anything that causes you to sin and therefore negatively impacts your relationship with God should be removed from your life now while Jesus is not recommending self amputation it is important to note that there are circumstances doctors in the room medically when a person may have to have a limb amputated in order to save their physical life in his autobiography between a rock and a hard place it was later turned into a movie Aaron Ralston tells the story of how while exploring a remote canyon in Utah he becomes trapped when a boulder falls on his arm he spends the next five days agonizing over the brutal decision he'd have to make he could either stay trapped or he could amputate his own arm and go free he did the latter and he lived to tell the story what in your life needs to be cut off cut out or cut down in order for you to be free what spiritual amputation needs to take place in order to save your spiritual life no

Jesus is not talking about physically removing eyes and limbs but rather performing spiritual surgery on yourself Hebrews 12 puts it this way let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us in other words you need to get rid of everything in your life that pulls you away from Jesus just as it's better to lose an arm than to lose your natural life it's better to lose your sin than to lose your eternal life yes the action is extreme but it matches the dire eternal consequences of failing to act ask yourself what seems to regularly trip me up in my relationship with God practically speaking and it may be it will be different for each and every one of us in this room that may mean there are things you need to walk away from things you need to let go of people you need to let go of places you just can't go anymore things you can't watch anymore environments you can't be around any longer conversations you can no longer entertain unhealthy habits hobbies you need to replace things you have to say no to and keep saying no to whatever it takes fight fight the power now I know all of this is easier said than done and it will be a fight particularly when temptation is everywhere and whoever told you that when you became a believer all the temptations would go away and all the struggle would stop whoever told you that lied to you they didn't tell the truth in many ways the struggle intensifies because of who you are now aligned to perhaps you can relate to this especially maybe some of the younger university students you're single you're not seeing anyone and it seems that no one is particularly expressing any interest at all in you then you meet someone and it appears to have the makings of a serious relationship things are going well and then out of nowhere something happens it now seems that everybody is interested in you random people are walking up to you complimenting you asking for your phone number people you thought didn't even know your name are now asking if you're seeing anyone well where were you six months ago this is how the enemy works he tempts you to try you and test your relationship with

Jesus Christ that's why you've got to fight and yield not to temptation because sin will destroy you and it will destroy your relationship sin like gangrene that infects the limbs if not checked and the limb not cut off will lead to death which by the way are the wages of sin Romans chapter six that didn't work let me try it another way many of you ask we found since we've been to Chicago you ask for people to take off their shoes when they come into your house why because you don't want the dirt from the outside to be brought inside and potentially damage your floors so church if you're going to follow Jesus king Jesus holy

Jesus righteous Jesus then you can't bring the dirt from the outside to the inside or it's going to cause damage something's gotta come off whatever it takes whatever the cost you've got to avoid sin so pastor Joe I hear you I hear you stay away from sin avoid sin I got it that's great that's good but how do I continue to fight the power of sin it's a great question I'm glad you asked it I'm glad you asked how do I continue to fight the power of sin how do I continue to resist temptation I'm trying but I'm struggling some areas I seem to be strong in and others I'm weak I start down the path well but somewhere along the way

I keep falling let me help you let me refer you back to the chorus of the hymn that we opened this message with the chorus to yield not to temptation says ask the savior to help you comfort strengthen and keep you he is willing to aid you he will carry you through you can't handle it on your own he will carry you through you're not strong enough by yourself he will carry you through when the walls of temptation are closing in on you he will carry you through there is a greater power that will help you fight the power of sin he will carry you through maybe maybe the chorus is not enough how about first

[28 : 00] Corinthians chapter 10 verse 13 no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape that you may be able to endure it he will carry you through now unto him who is able to keep you from falling he will carry you through mama nobody told me the road would be easy but I don't believe he brought me this far to leave me he will carry you through you my brothers and sisters just have to keep fighting there's nothing more important than your relationship with Jesus Christ so fight fight fight the power of sin and he will carry you through let's pray father we thank you that you do all things well and you are able to keep us sustain us even when we feel like we're going to stumble and to fall you are there to hold us up God let's evaluate ourselves and where necessary spiritually amputate those areas that are not like you those areas that would cause separation from you and damage our relationship we long to be closer to you let us lay aside the weight and the sin that so easily entangles us and press forward toward the mark that you've called us to your son's name we pray amen amen amen