

The Memoirs of Peter
The Disciple's Greatest Danger (Part 1)

Mark 9:42-48

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Well I invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Mark again. Mark chapter 9 as we continue through Mark's record of our Lord's life. We come to a passage tonight that warns us of a great danger something we desperately need to fear. It's really appropriate because we live in a society that is permeated by fear, even though in some measure, crime is down from when many of us were growing up, people are more fearful about crime than they've ever been before. Fear is such an ingrained part of our culture that businesses actually sell their products based on fear. One of the most obvious examples of that are the producers of television news who use fear to motivate you to turn on the news at 11. You know, how often have you heard something like this? "Research uncovers a deadly new danger that may be lurking in your home. Join us at 11 to see if you are at risk."

Last year, the Boston Globe reported on the top 10 fears of Americans. Not really a surprising list. This one is surprising for me just because it's what I do all the time, but topping the list is public speaking. Some of you understand that fear, I hear little bit about that when it comes to baptism and other things. Secondly, snakes, confined spaces, heights, spiders, tunnels and bridges, crowds, public transportation, especially airplanes, storms and water as in swimming and drowning. But let me ask you tonight. What is your greatest fear? More importantly, what should it be? Tonight in Mark chapter nine Jesus tells us exactly what it should be.

Just to remind you of the context that we're looking at. At some point after the Transfiguration that begins chapter nine, and after some five months of living in Gentile areas, Jesus has brought His disciples back to Galilee. Back to Capernaum back to the city on the northwest corner of the lake there that has been His ministry headquarters during the great Galilean portion of His ministry. Jesus and His disciples probably arrived back in the city of Capernaum from Caesarea Philippi late in the day near the time the evening meal and apparently after their meal was done Jesus assumed the official position of a Rabbi, their teacher. Verse 35, says, "sitting down He called the twelve, and said..." The larger context of the passage that we're looking at tonight is really from verses 33 all the way down through verse 50. And we've entitled this larger section *Essential Lessons For Every Disciple*. So far we discovered two of these essential lessons. The first was true greatness in Christ's kingdom is defined by humility. It's how we get into the kingdom, we come in as beggars. It's how greatness in Christ's kingdom is defined, the willingness to be the servant and slave of others. The second we discovered a couple of weeks ago, the kingdom of God is greater than your experience of it. Don't measure the kingdom of

God by your little world. The issue that Jesus addressed here was a sort of provincial sectarian's spirit. And we talked about that at length. And I encourage you if you weren't here for that to get up to speed with us, go back and listen.

But tonight we come to the third essential lesson for every disciple. It's found in verses 42 through verse 48. You follow along as I read it. Mark 9, verse 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, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.
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, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.
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.

The third crucial lesson that Jesus taught His disciples in this section that I've just read for you is that sin is always the disciple's greatest danger. He addresses it in two different ways in verse 42, causing others to sin is a great danger. It exposes us to danger from God Himself. The other danger in verses 43 to 48 is tolerating sin in our own lives in ourselves that exposes us to eventually eternal hell.

I want to begin tonight by just looking at the first of those; the danger of sin, the danger of specifically causing others to sin. Look again at verse 42. Here's where He makes His point, "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." This exact warning also occurs in the parallel passage in Matthew 18, verse 6, but it was apparently a saying that was somewhat common with Jesus and that He had repeated at least one other time because we find it in a totally different context in Luke 17:2. Now as we began to consider what our Lord means here, let's first of all consider the connection of this saying with its context here. What's the connection between this verse and what Jesus has just said? Well in verses 37 and 41, Jesus has just told His disciples that He takes very personally the way believers are treated. In fact, to treat a believer a certain way is to treat Christ the same way. Look at verse 37, "Whoever receives one child like this in my name receives Me, and whoever receives Me does not receive Me only but Him who sent Me." And look down at verse 41 where He reiterates the point in a slightly different way, "For whoever gives you a cup of water to drink, because of your name as followers of Christ, truly, I say to you, he will not lose his reward." Now both of those verses

show the positive side, if you receive a believer if you welcome him. you are welcoming Christ. If you give any believer, even an insignificant one, a cup of water because he or she is a follower of Christ, in the mind of Christ it's as if you've done it directly to Him.

That's the positive side, now in verse 42, Jesus explains the same point negatively. If, instead of receiving or welcoming a believer, if, instead of helping a believer, you don't receive them you don't help them, but you become a cause of sin in their lives, then it is sinning against Christ and He will take it very personally. That's the point of verse 42. We understand this don't we? Few things stir the human soul more than someone attacking our children. That response is instinctive with both animals and with people made in God's image. Why is that? Why particularly for those made in God's image? It's because we are made in God's image and our defensive response to those who sinfully or wrongfully attack our children is in reality a faint echo of God's own response and how He responds when His children are in any way mistreated. And He responds to others based on how they treat His children.

This is always been true by the way. You see it in the very beginning. Go back to Genesis 12, Genesis 12 in the Abrahamic covenant, you remember what God said to Abram? God rescues Abram, snatches him out of the idolatry of Ur of the Chaldeans and makes him His own. Sovereign salvation at its clearest. And then He makes this promise to Abram, verse 2, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you will be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." That was true of Abraham and his people, the ethnic people of God. It is true of all of God's people, including those of us who have been chosen and brought into the church. God takes the treatment of His own very personally.

You see it again over in the prophet Zechariah. Look at Zechariah 2:8. You've probably heard this reference before, but I love this, "For thus says the Lord of hosts, 'After glory He has sent Me against the nations which plunder you, for he [speaking to God 's people here] he who touches you [that is he who hurts you, who harms you] touches the apple of His eye.'" Notice His is capitalized. This is God using a sort of anthropomorphic or anthropopaphic expression that is some way to picture God using human characteristics and traits. Here God is described in anthropomorphic terms as having an eye. God of course is a Spirit, He doesn't have an eye, but He talks about the pupil; that word apple has to do with the cornea, the very sensitive center part of your eye and God says when somebody reaches out to harm My people; when they reach out to touch My people to hurt them, it's as if they thrust their finger into My eye.

You see the same thing over and the book of Acts. You remember Jesus response to Saul. Acts chapter 9, there on the Damascus Road when he sees this light, verse 3, that flashed all around him, he's knocked down to the ground. Verse 4, "He heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'" Notice He doesn't say "Why are you persecuting My

followers?” Jesus, on the Damascus Road, says to Saul, “Why are you persecuting Me?” Our God takes very personally when people hurt His own. It's as if someone tried to ram a finger in the eye of God. He blesses those who bless us, He curses those who curse us. And when we are hurt, it's as if they are attacking God Himself, why are you persecuting Me?

Tonight our Lord paints the reality of His protective care for His own in very graphic terms. Look back at again at verse 42 of Mark 9, “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.” Now notice the extent of the warning here. It's a universal truth, whoever, the indefinite pronoun is all inclusive. There are no exceptions to the point Jesus is about to make, whoever, doesn't matter who they are, but who's the focus of the statement? Who's the subject of the warning? Notice the expression “one of these little ones who believe.” Now if you go back to verse 36, of Mark 9, Jesus there had used a child who was present in this home as a kind of object lesson, you remember? This entire episode all of this passage we're calling *Essential Lessons For Disciples* happened in a home in Capernaum at the same time, probably on the same evening.

Jesus is teaching His disciples these things and in the middle of that, verse 36, He calls a little child over after dinner. It's possible that it was in Peter's home there in Capernaum. It's even possible that it was one of Peter's own children. So the Lord calls this child over and at first Luke tells us the child stood next to Jesus. But then Jesus took the child up in His arms, literally, Mark says that Jesus held the child in the bend of His arm. So you get some idea of the size of this little child. Old enough to stand and walk, but young enough to be held in the crook of your arm. So this is a young child. Perhaps old enough to believe, but probably not. Regardless, Jesus clearly here is not merely referring to physical children. He's referring to those who believe He says that. These little ones who believe. Jesus uses, by the way, this expression or similar expressions of adult followers, He calls them children in other places look over in chapter 10 verse 24, “The disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, ‘children,[this is to the 12] how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!’” In fact, Jesus uses this same expression, “little ones” in Matthew 10:42, where there is no mention in the context of children at all. And in Matthew 18, the parallel passage, He uses “little ones” to refer to the straying sheep, you remember the sheep that strayed and that the shepherd went out to get which is referring to a believer who strays into sin and has to be brought back that we are to help bring back. So we're talking about believers. Insignificant yet the significance here of little ones is just an insignificant everyday believer, nobody great; all of us. “Whoever” and the subject is one of these little ones who believe.

Now who are the recipients of this warning? To whom is this warning addressed? First of all it's addressed to unbelievers. How do we know that? Well, because of the parallel passage over in Matthew 18. In that passage Matthew adds this verse, “Woe to the world because of its

stumbling blocks for it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come, but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes.” It’s clear from this reference that Jesus meant for unbelievers this warning, those who delight in trying to get believers to sin. If you’ve been involved with people in the world at all, if you’ve interacted with either an unsaved family or an unsaved workplace you understand what this is like.

I remember when I was in several jobs when I was working when I was younger, you know, in the shipyards, when I was working in the funeral home and in other contexts. I remember that while I did my best to have a good relationship with my coworkers and most of the time it was tolerable. It was not unusual for them to try to tempt me to sin. I remember, specifically, at various times, the men I work with encouraging me to get drunk with them, encouraging me to have a sexual relationship with the girl I was dating at the time, encouraging me to lie to the boss. You understand this. When unbelievers do that to believers, it's as if they are sinning directly against Christ. That’s part of what this warning means. You see that in Matthew 25, you remember, and we won’t take the time to turn there. But you remember Matthew 25, the judgment of the sheep and the goats, where Jesus says there will be those who stand before Him, and Jesus says to them, you’re going you’re going to be cast into everlasting fire because I was hungry and you didn't feed me, I was thirsty and you didn't give Me anything to drink, I was naked and you didn't clothe me. I was in prison and you didn't visit Me. And they say wait a minute, when did we see You like that? And He says to the extent that you didn't do it to these who believe in Me, you didn't do it to Me. And the opposite is true as well. To sin against them is to sin against Christ.

But Mark's record shows that this warning was not solely for unbelievers. It was a warning intended for us as well. It was also intended for believers because by using the word in verse 42, “whoever,” Jesus included everyone, including believers. Also the context in both Matthew and Mark points to this because Jesus is sitting in a house alone with His disciples teaching them essential lessons about discipleship. And so this warning is for us, the danger of causing others to sin. It's really like Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:12, “by sinning against the brethren, you sin against Christ.” We could say by “causing them to sin” you sin against Christ as well.

Now let’s look at the meaning of Jesus’ warning. What exactly does He mean? Look at verse 42, the key here is “causes one of these little ones who believe to stumble.” There’s the offense that invites the wrath of Jesus, “causes to stumble.” Now, this translates one Greek word. This verb comes from the noun scandalon which you’ll recognize obviously from the English word scandal. But in Greek, this noun originally referred to the bait stick on a trap or a snare. The animal, as he was going after the bait or the food, would brush against that stick and it would trigger the trap. Some of you have had some experience with this. So it came to refer to anything against which a person strikes. It included a stumbling block and included a trap or an obstacle. The verb form, then, that's used here came to mean several things. It came to refer to

obstructing someone's path; to being a stumbling block. It came to mean to cause pain or to displease, like our modern use of the word "offend," you offended me. But the most common usage and the one that's here is it means to make someone stumble and fall, morally, to cause them to sin. That's the idea in this context. So Jesus says if anyone causes a Christian to sin it would be better for that person to have a millstone hung around his neck and to be cast into the sea.

Now it's interesting here because notice those words, "heavy millstone," literally, the Greek text reads, "a millstone of a donkey." That's very interesting, because if you know the culture, that has significance. You see, in the first century to mill various grains to make flour, the people of the ancient world had designed a simple stone device. On the bottom of this device was a stone shaped like a upside down cone, with its curved point sticking up, then sitting on top of that was a large stone that fit perfectly over that cone and in the top of the middle, there was a hole for feeding the grain into, the harvested grain, and then there was, usually, there was something coming out the side of that upper stone that enabled you to turn it. And as it was turned, the grain was ground between the upper and the lower stones. Now there were two sizes of these millstones, one was relatively small, so that a woman could turn it by hand. The other was so large that it took an animal to turn it. It weighed several hundred pounds. Clearly, it's this larger, heavier kind that Jesus had in mind. You can see how one stone set upon another and then out of the small parts on the side of it, they would put a large beam into that hole on each side and then donkeys would turn it. And so the word used here is a millstone of a donkey. It was a huge millstone like this, if I were standing next to this, it would come up some 3-1/2, 4 feet on me, it's a huge stone weighing several hundred pounds.

Jesus says if you cause a believer to sin it would've been better for you to have died by having one of these tied around your neck and thrown into the lake of Galilee. Jesus' warning describes a brutal, frightening form of death, but it was one of with which the disciples would've been familiar. There was at least one example of this very thing happening in Israel. The Romans had done exactly this to some of the leaders under an early Jewish zealot named Judas the Galilean. They literally took that upper stone that weighed several hundred pounds, and through the hole in the center they put a rope and then they tied it around the people's necks, went out into the Sea of Galilee and threw them overboard. That's what Jesus is describing.

Now what does Jesus mean "it would be better for them" if this had happened? In what sense would it be better for a true believer to have a millstone hung around his neck and be drowned in the sea? Why is it better that his life ends prematurely and violently? Now this is a theological question. We know, as we learned this morning, that a believer is fully and completely forgiven in justification. That he will never stand before God in judgment for his sin. Romans 8:1, as we saw this morning, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." So what does Jesus mean? Well He has to mean one of two things. He has to mean, first of all,

that the person who regularly causes believers to sin may very well not be a Christian at all. This is a warning. This is a warning, how you treat believers is a barometer of the reality of your own faith. I mentioned Matthew 25; this is what he says there in verse 45, “he will answer to them. truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.” Help them. The opposite would be true as well, “To the extent that you sinned against one of these you sinned against Me. These will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous into eternal life.”

You see this in 1 John turn with me to 1 John chapter 2 and verse 9. John was giving tests of those who were truly Christians. How do you know if you're truly Christian? Well, one way is by how you treat other Christians. Verse 9, “the one who says he is in the light...” So here's somebody who claims to be a Christian, “Oh yeah I'm a Christian. Oh I prayed a prayer. I've asked God's forgiveness. I know I'm forgiven.” “the one who says he is in the Light, and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now, the one who loves his brother abides in the light and there's no cause of stumbling in him.”

Here, we are learning that there is a dichotomy. He claims to be in the Light. He claims to know God, and have a relationship with God, but in reality he doesn't and he lives in darkness. Verse 11, “the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” In other words, he's not Christian. He may say I walk in the light, but if he hates his brother, he walks in the darkness. He's not really a Christian. Listen, do you love God's people? Do you really? Are you concerned about them, are you concerned about what concerns them? Do you pray for them? Do you help them? Do you enjoy them? And do you keep from causing them to sin? The person who regularly causes believers to sin, may very well not be a Christian at all. That's part of what Jesus is saying here, but I think He's also saying more. I think He's saying that the true Christian who causes another Christian to sin will chase will face chastening for his sin in this life. And that discipline will be so severe or may be so severe that it would have been better for his life have ended prematurely and violently.

The passage that comes to my mind is 1 Corinthians chapter 3. You remember where our Lord, through the Apostle Paul, gives this sort of illustration of the church as a temple with individual stones. And it's gradually being constructed by leaders that are appointed. He was the master builder who laid the foundation here in the New Testament with the other apostles and prophets of the New Testament times. And now leaders in the church are building on it and he warns the leaders who were building that's us who are leaders in His church, he warns us to be careful how we build and to be careful not to destroy the legitimate work of those who've gone before and he says this, “you are the temple of God.” And he uses the plural pronoun he's not talking here now about my body being the temple of God, that's true; He says that in another place. Here he's talking about the church collectively as the temple of God, “you are the temple of God,” and he says, “if anyone destroy the temple of God, if anyone harms the temple of God” and

remember now, he's talking to leaders in the church. "That person, God will destroy." That person God will harm. You harm God's church. He'll harm you. He takes it very personally. And I think that's exactly what's being said here. The true Christian who harms another believer by causing him to sin invites the severe discipline of God into his life to the extent that it would've been better for his life to have ended violently and prematurely. That's pretty serious.

So if we're going to take Jesus' warning seriously, we need to ask ourselves how can we avoid this danger? What we really need to ask is how do we cause others to sin? What are the ways we cause others to sin? And we better avoid them. Because Jesus is serious. Jesus, if He were here tonight, would say listen, you better not do these things because if you do them it would be better for one of those several hundred pound millstones to be hung around your neck and you to be thrown in Lake Grapevine. So how do we cause others to sin? This isn't a comprehensive list, but here are some of the most common ways we cause others to sin.

Number 1 and in the context, this is the application I think, by harboring those provincial attitudes of spiritual superiority that we saw last time. When we exclude others from our little spiritual clicks, we can cause them to sin in various ways. They can become discouraged. They can be tempted to be angry or resentful or even walk away from the church, we better be careful how we treat other people who are believers. We better not cut them off from the fellowship; exclude them from our little circle because they don't fit. They don't school their children the way we school our children. They don't dress the same way we dress, same styles, I mean, I'm not talking about modesty now, I'm talking about styles, appearance, they don't fit the same demographic we fit. Whatever the criteria might be we have to be so careful because by harboring provincial attitudes we can cause others to sin and I think, in the context, that's the first application.

Secondly, we can cause others to sin by ignoring or misusing the impact of our example. Listen, other people watch your life. I don't care who you are, someone is watching you and is tempted to follow your example. You better be very careful how you use that example because Jesus takes it seriously. One passage that came to my mind when I was thinking about this, 1 Kings 21:25, "Surely there was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord because Jezebel his wife incited him." By her own prodding, by her own example and we can do this in the lives of others. We can have, by our example an impact that causes other people to sin. Think for a moment about the example you set for others who are watching you in terms of where you go, the places you choose to go, the language you choose to speak with. What you laugh at. The movies and television you watch. The books and magazines you read. The music you listen to, etc. etc. etc. What examples are you setting that may be leading someone else to choose sin?

A third way that we cause others to sin is by abusing or misusing the power of our influence on those under our authority. This can happen in all the different contexts, husbands to wives, husbands, we can urge our spouses and I've unfortunately seen this happen. I've heard, fortunately not in the church, but I've heard spouses do this urge their spouse to lie to workers to get a cheaper price. Urge their spouses to lie on their taxes to save some money. Encouraged the spouse to watch entertainment that is sinful. Intentionally trying to provoke the anger of the spouse just to get back at them. That's a misuse of the power of our influence on those under our authority. Another would be parents to children. Again, an Old Testament passage came to mind Second Chronicles 22, "Ahaziah was 22 years old when he became king and he reigned one year in Jerusalem and his mother's name was Athaliah. He walked in the ways of the house of Ahab for his mother was his counselor to do wickedly. He did evil in the sight of the Lord like the house of Ahab, for they were his counselors after the death of his father to his destruction." We can misuse the influence that we have in our kids lives for evil. We saw it back in Mark 6, you remember, where Herodias says, "I want John the Baptist's head on a platter," and she used her daughter to that end. You see it in Ephesians 6:4, where we can provoke our children to anger, we can misuse our authority and can make them angry by our unreasonableness by our harshness, other things.

You know a year ago this week was sort of a national example of this abuse by parents of their authority with their children. You remember, it hit the news about a year ago, what has commonly been called "the balloon boy." You remember that? Where that family just to get publicity said that their son was floating away in that balloon and it turns out all of it was a hoax. They'd encouraged their children to lie so they could have some financial gain. But it happens on a more basic level as well. Parents who tell their children to lie for them. Oh, just tell them I'm not here. And on and on it goes. That's an abuse of that authority. The same thing had happened with government to its citizens. You see it with Jeroboam. Jeroboam provoked the people of Israel to sin. Manasseh did the same. You can look at those texts and see that. Spiritual leaders can do it to those who are in their care can abuse their influence and get them to sin. In Jeremiah 23, the leaders of Israel were setting an example and using their authority to encourage sin.

A fourth way that we can cause others to sin is by teaching error in false doctrine. You see this in the cults and their leaders. If we had time I take you to Revelation 2, where you see two examples in the church in Pergamum in the church in Thyatira where those who had infiltrated the church and were teaching error and causing God's people to sin, causing them to excuse their sin. This is a warning for all of those who are in leadership in the cults for those like Joseph Smith and Judge Rutherford, who start cults and cause God's people to be trapped for a time in falsehood and error. Jesus says, "it would have been better for them if they had died a violent premature death." And of course, in their case, because they're not truly regenerate, someday they will stand before a just and holy God, and give an account for how they have abused people.

But not only in cults, those within the true faith who by their teaching, give believers permission to sin are causing them to sin. You even see it with Aaron, you remember the story. Moses is gone, he's on the mountain and in Exodus 32, the people said, "where is Moses, we don't know what's happened to him, you know make us a god to worship we can't see this God. Where is He? The gods of Egypt we could see!" And so Aaron says, "Bring me your gold and I'll fashion you a golden calf and then he declares a feast to the Lord." He abused his authority and gave them permission to sin. The same thing happens among true shepherds today, that is those who are true believers, but who teach God's people error. People like, the one that came to my mind when I was thinking about this were the free grace people, the non-lordship people who basically give people license to sin.

A fifth way is by simply persuading others to sin with us. We cause others to sin when we just try to persuade them to go along with us. Eve was the first to do this. You remember in Genesis 3, "after she took from it's fruit and ate, she also gave to her husband with her and he ate." This trend is unabated to the day. Often with kids it's, "Aww come on! What do you think you are?" With adults there is the persuasion to be involved in sexual sin. The persuasion to be involved in financial dishonesty. Creating a business that's a scam. On and on it goes. Encouraging people to sin with you. Let me ask you, can you think of a time when you tried to get someone else to join you in doing what you knew was wrong? If that person was a Christian it was far more than a sin against that person. Christ took that as a direct attack upon Himself.

Finally, we can cause others to sin by abusing our Christian liberty. Romans 14 talks about that at length. We must never allow our Christian liberty to cause others to sin. We went through that passage now a year or so ago and saw what was there. When we take, what we say is our Christian liberty those things that the Bible doesn't expressly forbid, and we say we're going to do them and we don't care how it affects anybody else. We don't care if anybody else is around that might be hurt. If we cause them to sin, then we are violating the text we're looking at tonight. Paul says in verse 21 of Romans 14, "it is good not to eat meat or to drink wine or to do anything by which your brother stumbles." That is, by which he is caused to sin. Paul says don't ever exercise your legitimate Christian liberty if it's going to be the stone over which your brother trips into sin. And Paul, here, goes way beyond the problems in the church in Rome. He says it's good not to do anything that will cause your brother to stumble. In other words, limit your Christian liberty whatever the issue might be. And if you refuse to do that and if the person falls into sin then you are sinning against Christ.

Look at 1 Corinthians, First Corinthians chapter 8, verse 10, "Someone sees you, who have knowledge, dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died." Of course, here Paul is dealing with the problem that was specific

to Corinth, going and eating in an idol's temple and by doing that causing others to sin. Verse 12, "And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ."

If we cause the least of the little ones who believe in Jesus to sin, in any of these ways, it would be better for us to die violently and prematurely, that's what Jesus is saying. Why? Because to do it against one of His little ones is to do it against Him. He takes it just that personally. Brothers and sisters, we better be very careful about causing others to sin by our example or by urging them to sin with us or any of the other ways that are listed here. This is obviously a serious warning, but as we finish our time I want to remind you that there's also a huge encouragement here specifically about our Lord's love for us. The little ones here, even the most insignificant believers, that's us, we are the little ones who believe. Even for us, we matter so much to Jesus, that to cause even one of us to sin is with Him more than a capital offense. He loves us that much. He cares about us that much. That for us to be caused to sin is just like someone took their finger and rammed it into the pupil of His eye. We are the focus of His vision. We are the pupil of His eye. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for this passage. Thank You for the very practical nature of our Lord's warning. Lord, help us to take this seriously. Help us to see how serious He is about it. Lord that image is such a graphic one and it tells us how important this is to Christ, and I pray, Father, that You would help us to be just as serious about it as well. May we take seriously the responsibility that's been given to us to be an influence for good in the lives of the people around us and not to be an intentional cause for sin in their lives. Father, make us a blessing to the people who belong to Christ because we know in so doing, it will be as if we did it to Him. Thank You for that wonderful reminder of His love for us of Your love for us, Father, may that motivate us to live this week in the light of Your grace, in the light of Your love, in the light of Your boundless affection for Your own. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.