

**Exegetical Notes, Mark 9:38-50**  
***“Radical Spiritual Surgery”***

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Cornerstone Fellowship  
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320  
610-384-1375  
charleshjensen@aol.com

**Mark 9:38-50**

**Verse 38**

***“Teacher,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”***

- Apparently, the disciples had discovered a man who was driving out demons in Jesus’ name. The implication is that this man was a believer. But not one of the 12.
- The disciples told him to stop doing what he was doing because he was not of their group.
- He was also doing successfully what they had failed at doing on at least one occasion.
- Having stopped the man without first bringing Jesus’ attention to the situation, they tell Jesus, hoping to get his approval.

**Verse 39-40**

***“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”***

- However, Jesus did not give his approval to their action. He attempted to alter their understanding. He wanted them to see that their group was not the only group that followed him.

**Verse 41**

***“I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.”***

- Jesus explained to the disciples that even small needs, much less significant than driving out demons, are noticed by God and are rewarded by him. In fact, no deed of kindness done for one who belongs to Jesus because he belongs to Jesus is unnoticed by God.

## Verse 42

***“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large milestone tied around his neck.”***

- The words translated, “little ones,” are better translated “lesser ones.” Jesus was referring to the man who had been casting out demons. He was of lesser importance in the disciples’ minds because he was not one of them.
- He was saying that such a person was led astray, “caused to sin,” by someone who thought they were more important than he, it would be better for the “more important person” to be drowned in the sea.
- Jesus was asking the disciples to change their attitude about who was greatest in the kingdom of God. See Mark 9:35-37.

## Verse 43-48

***“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”***

- Jesus suggests some radical spiritual surgery here. His point is that we need to root out of our lives things that cause us to sin, to desert the path of God. He is saying that any action, any sight, any attitude which pulls us away from God must be removed from our lives.
- The purpose of this surgery is to prepare us for life, for the Kingdom of God.
- Most scholars remind readers that Jesus is speaking in hyperbole. He is not urging people to actually cut off their hands and/or feet or to pluck out their eyes. He is telling them that ridding our lives of those actions and attitudes which are offensive to God is extremely important because living such a disciplined life prepares us for heaven.
- The word translated “hell” in these verses is the word “Gehenna.” Gehenna was a valley south of Jerusalem that had been used for offering human sacrifice during the reign of King Ahaz. (735-715BC). In Jesus’ day it was the garbage dump for the city of Jerusalem. There, the fires perpetually burned and the worms were fat

and juicy as they ate their way through garbage. It was a smoky, fiery, smelly, horrible place. It was the place that symbolized the final abode of those who rejected God.

### **Verse 49-50**

***“Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”***

- Jesus was saying that all of those who follow him will be tested and confronted with the necessity to abandon unhelpful attitudes and sinful actions. If we are unwilling to change, we lose our saltiness and so become useless to him, to ourselves, and to the kingdom.
- When we allow him to do radical spiritual surgery on us, to change us and remake us in his image, we find peace with him and with the others who are part of his kingdom.

*(The NIV translation of the Bible, along with other more recent translations, eliminates verse 44 and 46 from the text. This is because these verses do not appear in the oldest Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark. However, the older manuscripts do include verse 48, as does the NIV. Verses 44 and 46 are exactly the same as verse 48. Their exclusion in the NIV presents no problem since verse 48 is included.)*

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Radical Spiritual Surgery*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)