

OCCURRENCES AND CONSEQUENCES OF OFFENCES

Mk.9:38-50

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. To be offended or to be the offender in the biblical sense of these terms can be or can result in both a present, a future, or even fatal, eternal consequences.
2. Of course, because an offence occurs or one has become an offender does not mean that such must necessarily result in fatal, eternal consequences.
3. Nor does it mean that I or you must become or cannot avoid becoming an offender in the first place. For there are ways and means of preventing it and or rectifying it once we become guilty of it.
4. With all of this in mind, we shall in this lesson investigate what the Bible teaches about occurrences and the consequences of offences in the biblical sense and use of the terms offence and or offend.

II. DISCUSSION

A. 1ST, THE DEFINITION OF THE TERMS “OFFENCE” AND “OFFEND”.

1. “Offence” (SKANDALON, skan-dal-on): “In the N.T. skandlon is always used metaphorically, and ordinarily of anything that arouses prejudice, or becomes a hindrance to others, or causes them to fall by the way. Thus it is used ... (b) of that which is evil,” Vine, III, 129.
2. “Offend” (skandalizo, skan-dal-id-zo): “signifies to put a snare or stumbling-block in the way...to cause to stumble,” Vine, III, 130. Strong, 4624: “to entice to sin”
3. Further thoughts on the applied meaning of the term offend as we seek to understand and feel the full force of it in our study.
 - a. We are talking about being the bait in trap in a spiritual sense which allures the unsuspecting into the trap and ensnare them.
 - b. In effect, it means to have no regard for others’ spiritual weakness by refusing to adapt ourselves as we ought to their weakness in the faith, and their weakness of conscious, due to their lack of spiritual growth and knowledge in the faith.
 - c. It is to destroy their innocence by being their encouragement to do the wrong thing, hence push them along the road to forbidden things in violation of their conscious. That is, to act in some way

inconsistent with their principles, or with what they believe to be right, and, therefore, sin.

- d. Hence, to teach or to lead another, or one of these “little ones” who believe in Christ, to sin must be one of the worst sins of all.
- e. It may be some act or teaching of mine that violates another’s conscientious scruples.
 - (1) Whether or not that one be over-scrupulous in matters of opinion due to a lack of knowledge is not the primary question.
 - (2) Rather, the issue is whether or not his conscience has been shaken from its foundation principles of what he believes to be right by what I do; that is, by my actions he is caused to act in violation of his conscience and therefore to sin.

B. OCCASIONS OF OFFENSES – BIBLE EXAMPLES OF: --

- 1. Looking upon the opposite sex to lust after, or with lustful intentions, Mt.5:27-30.
- 2. Times of tribulation and persecution arising because of the word, Mt.13:20,21.
- 3. Rejecting, forbidding, refusing fellowship with other believers in Jesus Christ as did the Apostles of Jesus Christ in Mk.9:38-42.
- 4. Refusing to bear the infirmities of the weak in the faith in the use of liberties in matters of opinion in such things as esteeming or regarding one day above another, or regarding every day alike, and the eating of meat offered to idols, Rom.14:1-15; 1Cor.8:4-13; Cf. 1Cor.10:32,33; 9:19-23.
- 5. Pride and haughtiness, Prov.16:18.
- 6. All evil influences – allurements, persuasions, temptations, bad examples, malicious representation, insults, and persecutions, etc., may be occasions of stumbling.

C. THESE EXAMPLES OF OCCURRENCES OF OFFENCE TEACH THAT CHRIST HOLDS THE OFFENDER RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INJURY THEY MAY CAUSE TO OTHERS AS WELL AS TO SELF.

1. See Mt.18:6,7; Mk.9:42.
 - a. “It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”
 - (1) It would be better for the one “whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me” to have died an awful death of drowning before he had committed such a sin than to have lived and committed it!
 - b. “Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh”
 - (1) Divine penalty threatens.
 - (2) A terms used in denunciation of one.
2. The words “these little ones which believe in me,” show that Jesus is here speaking, not of “little one” in age, but of his disciples, who are of a humble spirit.
3. Observe from this:
 - a. There are no infallible final perseverance of the saints making it impossible for them to be lost after once being saved from past sins as some claim.
 - (1) The recognition of this truth is the very inspiration of this discourse.
 - (2) These woes would never have been denounced upon men for the doing of what, otherwise, would be impossible.
 - (3) Let not believers in Christ be high-minded. Let them fear. Let them watch. Let them pray. Cf. Rom.11:19-22.
 - b. “It must needs be that offences come” (Mt.18:7); “It is impossible but that offences will come” (Lk.17:1).
 - (1) It doesn’t mean we have to be or cannot avoid being offenders.
 - (2) They are permitted as part of a necessary discipline of our probation. They come from the abuse of free agency!
 - (3) To the faithful, able to resist temptation (1Cor.10:13; Jas.1:12) they prove blessed means of grace. The habit of resisting temptation makes a strong character. Jas.1:2-5; Rom.5:3-5.
 - c. The instigator is still responsible. Cf. Mt.5:27-30; 18:6-9; Mk.9:42; Rom.14; 1Cor.8.
 - (1) Where he succeeds in causing the saints to stumble he will have to answer for the soul damaged or ruined. There is no impunity for them for their action.

- (2) V.6 of Mt.18 is the antithesis of V.5, since to harm or hinder one of these “little ones what believe in me” is to attack Jesus. Cf. Ac.9:4; 5:39.
 - (3) Better a millstone than a stumbling-block. Or better for one to have died a horrible death by drowning before he had lived to commit the sin of offending one of these believers in Christ!
 - (4) V.7 of mt.18 indicated just how horrible it really is to be a stumbling-block.
 - (5) Even when and where the tempter fails he is still responsible for his wickedness in being the tempter!
- d. These things need to be emphasized because the offender is too often all too ready to refuse to recognize his responsibility, not only for his own failure to recognize Christ, but for the injury he does in hindering others!

D. THESE EXAMPLES TEACH THAT ANY AND ALL THINGS THAT OFFEND OTHERS OR SELF MUST BE CAST ASIDE AT ANY AND ALL COST, Mt.5:29,30; 18:8,9; Mk.9:43-48.

1. The question turns on our concern for our ultimate destiny.
 - a. To frustrate that in deference to any present, worldly pleasure, or to escape from any present soul-condemning trouble, is to commit a fatal mistake.
 - b. In these things we are not concerned with some slight inconvenience in the future. The thought is of complete shipwreck of the soul, of being thrown into perdition on account of the hindrance which is very difficult for us to remove due to inordinate desires.
 - c. But so serious a danger does not admit of any consideration for the present annoyance involved in escaping it.
2. The engineer will tunnel through mountains, blow up huge rocks, and bridge wide chasms to bring his construction project to its completion.
3. Shall any hindrance be permitted to block the Christian’s course to eternal life?
4. Of course, self-mutilation is not the Lord’s method for the Christian to avoid temptation. Even if it were, it would be wise to resort to it in view of the alternative.

5. Lust and hatred in the heart are not and cannot be destroyed by plucking out an eye or cutting off a hand. There must be a change of heart!
6. Self-denial leads to heaven; self-indulgence leads to hell! We must cut off the causes, the occurrences and occasions of sin, though they be as closely bound up with our life as is the hand, or foot, or eye.
7. Our Lord's counsel rests upon the recognized fact that bodily organs are the agents of sin.
 - a. The palate is the agency of drunkenness and gluttony, the eye of sensuality, and the hand of dishonesty.
 - b. We do not really cure a moral evil by merely removing the agency through which it gains expression.
8. If Jesus be interpreted merely in a literal sense, sheer irrelevancy results. For he even rejected a purely literal construction of phrases like this when he refused to make his disciples wash their hands before eating merely to remove ceremonial defilement, Mt.15:1-3,20.
9. Since wickedness of heart produces sin in the use of the members, or out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, which are the things that defile a man, that offend or causeth thee to stumble, the purification must take place in the heart.
 - a. Study Mt.15:1-20 and Mk.7:1-23 to appreciate this concept.)
10. Anything as seemingly defensible, precious or useful to us as these parts of our body – the eye, the hand, or the foot – had better be surrendered than to permit them to destroy our soul.
11. Many good things in and of themselves can so often be so used to be the enemy of the best: for example, any habit allowed to become a seduction, any possession allowed to become an obsession, any association or any pleasure allowed to become the cause of sin, is a mortal enemy of our soul.

E. THESE EXAMPLES WARN THAT ALL IMPENITENT OFFENDERS WILL SUFFER THE ETERNAL FIRES OF HELL.

1. Mt.5:29,30.
2. Mt.13:41,42.
3. Mt.18:8,9.
4. Mk.9:43-48.

5. Necessarily implied in all these verses is the fact that there is yet space for repentance as long as there is life in the body in order to avoid the ultimate, fatal death sentence.

F. THEREFORE MK.9:49,50, OF THE CONTEXT OF MK.9:38-50, CONTINUE BY MEANS OF THE FIGURE OF BEING “SALTED WITH FIRE” TO FURTHER INDICATE HOW SUCH ETERNAL SUFFERINGS ARE TO BE PREVENTED.

1. It's true that Vv.49,50 have been recognized as very difficult passages. But based on the context beginning at V.38 there is good reason to believe that V.49 has no reference at all to future punishment; and that the difficulty of interpreting Vv.49,50 and understanding them has arisen from erroneously supposing V.49 to be connected with V.48, that is, that V.49 is given as a reason for explanation of what is said in V.48, rather than considering it as designed to illustrate the general design of the context as a whole beginning at V.38.
2. When we return to and consider the context from its beginning at V.38, we can see that the main scope of the context was not a discourse on future punishment; but that that is brought in incidentally to emphasize the urgent need of self-control to prevent being or becoming an offender of these “little ones” that believe on Jesus.
3. If you will notice, the chief object of the whole context is as follows:
 - a. To teach his chosen apostles that they were not to forbid the “one” or ones they saw “casting out devils in the name of Jesus, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us,” V.38.
 - (1) These are the “little ones” that believe on Jesus of V.42.
 - (2) Obviously, these whom the apostles refused to accept and whom the apostles forbade were accepted by Jesus because they were actually working miracles in his name or by his authority; they were “casting out devils” in Jesus’ name, V.38.
 - (3) Furthermore, note what Jesus said about these in Vv.39-41.
 - b. In V.42 Jesus warns his apostles that they must avoid giving offence or becoming a stumbling-block to these “little ones that believe in me” ; that is, these other believers you have seen working miracles in my name; it would be better for you to have died before you had committed such a sin.

- c. In Vv.43-48 he uses strong metaphorical language to teach them that every effort must be made on their part to remove every offending member of their body, make every sacrifice necessary, to avoid given offence to these little ones who believe in me.
- 4. In other words, that everything which would endanger their salvation should be sacrificed; that they should deny themselves in every way in order to obtain eternal life. In this way, and only in this way, they would be preserved to eternal life.
- 5. “For (i.e., in this way) every one shall be salted with fire..., V.49a.
 - a. The word “fire,” here, therefore, denotes self-denials, sacrifice, trials, in keeping oneself from the gratification of the flesh.
- 6. What Jesus is saying about salting with fire and salt in V.49 must of necessity be a part of his discourse and explanation of the whole context beginning at V.38, where he begins to warn his apostles about forbidding and offending or becoming a stumbling-block to “these little ones” they had encountered who were working miracles in Jesus’ name, but who were not with the apostles of Jesus.
 - a. Remember: These others were also believers, V.42.
 - b. They could not have been successful miracle-workers in Jesus’ name if this were not true!
- 7. Remember also, that in Vv.42-48 he warns his apostles about the danger of offending one of these little ones and reveals the urgency of their need to exercise self-control as the means of avoiding it, as well as the fatal, eternal destructible end if they fail to do it.
- 8. Then in Vv.49,50, by means of the figure of being “salted with fire” he further indicates how such a disaster is to be prevented.
 - a. The figure is made more startling by speaking of salting “with fire.”
 - b. They are to be “salted with fire.”
 - c. The close proximity of “the fire that never shall be quenched” in Vv.43-48 causes some to conclude that the “fire” of “salted with fire” of V.49 is one and the same.
 - d. But not so! Salt preserves unless it has “lost its saltiness.” The unquenchable fire in hell does not salt; it torments.
 - e. The fire that acts as salt in V.49 must be a different fire.
 - (1) It is in reality salt, but salt in its burning property when it destroys the germs of corruption.
 - (2) It is the Word of God in its power to burn out of our hearts the evil desire to entrap others (V.42), as well as the evil

desires that would allow our own bodily members to entrap us ourselves (Vv.43-48). See Jer.23:29.

9. In V.50 there are two specific things to consider:
 - a. **CAUTION**, V.50a: The preserving power of this chastening fire for the disciples only operates where men permit it to work by making every sacrifice necessary.
 - (1) “Salt is good.” Otherwise, it would be like saltless salt – salt that has lost its saltiness, become useless in their individual lives.
 - (2) This very same chastening, disciplinary fires, come to the ungodly too, but it does them no good, because they do not respond to it with the same spirit of self-sacrifice as the godly.
 - (3) The self-same fire to them is like **salt that has lost its savor**, and the corruption continues!
 - b. **EXHORTATION**, V.50b: “**Have salt in yourselves**”, i.e., let the aforementioned fire which preserves you do its work.
 - (1) Welcome the purifying, preserving, principle of self-denial, enduring trials, removing stumbling-blocks, pride, ambition and contention.
 - (2) Welcome the severity of self-discipline, self-judgment and self-sacrifice.

III. CONCLUSION

1. In this study we have noted various biblical examples of occurrences of offenses.
2. We have attempted to make one and all aware of the terrible consequences of being an offender for the impenitent.
3. We have studied Mk.9:38-50 and its context where Jesus had to deal with his own apostles and their problem of offending the “little ones” who were believers in Jesus.
4. In all examples cited there is necessary implication that there is yet space for repentance for the offender as long as there is life in the body; space to repent in order to avoid the eternal fires of hell awaiting the impenitent offender.