

This is one of the complicated passages in the Gospels. So Let's break down **Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48** and I will try to explain it.

The Passage:

Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48 (NRSV):

38 John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

39 But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.

40 Whoever is not against us is for us.

41 For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

42 "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.

45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell.

47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell,

48 where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched."

Explaining the Passage

1. The Power of Jesus' Name (v. 38-41):

- In these verses, John tells Jesus that they tried to stop someone from casting out demons because they were not part of the immediate group of disciples. But Jesus responds by telling them not to stop him because anyone who acts in His name is doing good.
- **Catholic teaching** here emphasizes that the power of God is not limited to just a small group or even to the apostles. God works through many people, even those we may not expect. This teaches us that the Church recognizes truth and goodness, even outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC 819) acknowledges that elements of sanctification and truth can be found in other Christian communities.
- **In Simple terms:** This means we should be open to seeing good in others, even if they don't belong to our particular group. God can work through anyone who sincerely seeks Him.

2. Avoiding Scandal (v. 42):

- Jesus gives a strong warning about causing others, especially the "little ones," to stumble or lose faith. In Catholic teaching, this refers to **scandal**—leading others into sin or doubt. The Church teaches that our actions can have a profound impact on others, especially younger or weaker believers.
- **In Simple terms:** Your words and actions matter. If you act in a way that leads others away from God, especially those who are looking up to you, that's serious. Jesus tells us to be mindful of how we influence others.

3. Cutting Off What Causes Sin (v. 43-48):

- These verses can seem extreme—Jesus talks about cutting off hands, feet, and eyes if they lead us to sin. But He's using **hyperbole** (exaggeration) to make a strong point: **sin is serious**. It's better to give up things that lead us away from God, even if it's difficult, than to risk losing eternal life.
- The Catholic Church teaches that sin can lead us away from God and, ultimately, to **eternal separation from Him** (hell). However, through God's grace and the sacraments, particularly **confession**, we can be forgiven and healed.
- **In Simple terms:** Think of it this way—if you have a habit, a friendship, or something in your life that's leading you away from God, it's better to let go of it, even if it's hard, than to let it pull you further from Him. It might be like giving up something you really enjoy but know is bad for you, like a bad habit or toxic relationship.

4. Hell and the Seriousness of Sin:

- Jesus mentions **hell** several times in this passage, describing it as a place where "the worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched." This imagery shows the seriousness of turning away from God. Catholic teaching affirms that hell is real, but it is not a place where God wants anyone to go. Hell is a result of our free choice to reject God's love and grace.
- **In Simple terms:** God loves you so much that He gives you free will—the choice to accept or reject Him. But choosing sin and rejecting God has serious consequences. God's mercy is always available to you, and He wants you to choose life and to be with Him forever.

Key Takeaways:

- **God can work through anyone**, even people who might not be Catholic or Christian. Be open to the good in others.
- **Your actions affect others**. Be careful not to lead others into sin or doubt.
- **Take sin seriously**. If something in your life is leading you away from God, be brave enough to remove it, even if it's hard.
- **God's mercy is always available**. But we need to actively choose to follow Him and reject sin. Heaven and hell are real, and God wants you to choose eternal life with Him.

This passage encourages you to think about how you live your faith, both in how you treat others and in your personal commitment to avoiding sin.