

JESUS: THE SERVANT AT WORK

VOLUME TWO

STUDY SEVENTEEN

Terrifying Warnings

Mark 9:42–50

The concern of Jesus is to deal with sinfulness in your life or mine that takes away from the impact we could have for Him. Because the problem is radical, there must be a radical solution.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

DOCTORS don't put a bandage on a broken bone or give an aspirin to someone with a life-threatening infection. Neither do they tell a patient with a malignant tumor to ignore it and assume it will go away. These are *radical* problems that require *radical* solutions. The broken bone must be set; the infection, treated with strong antibiotics; and the tumor, surgically removed.

What's true medically is also true spiritually.

In our day, entertainers and advertisers promote sin as a toy to play with, but Jesus sees the true, destructive nature of sin. He understands how slander and gossip break apart communities, how infections like jealousy and lust poison our closest relationships, and how the cancers of envy and bitterness eat away our own soul.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus warned His followers about sin because He cared about them. He wasn't content to dispense platitudes like aspirins to treat deadly sins. No. As the Great Physician, Jesus prescribed radical spiritual solutions to treat radical spiritual problems.

In our previous *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Jesus taught us how to kill the snake of jealousy and experience abundant life. In the passage for this study, we'll turn our attention to Jesus' most terrifying warnings about sin. They had to be terrifying to get our attention! So open your ears and listen as Jesus communicates in the strongest terms *the urgent necessity to deal with the most dangerous enemies of our soul*.



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The Bible-Teaching Ministry of Chuck Swindoll
Study 17 • Page 1

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES
BIBLE STUDIES

Terrifying Warnings

Mark 9:42–50



PREPARE YOUR HEART

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. (Hebrews 4:12)

Approach God's throne with a deep sense of gratitude for Scripture. In your own words, welcome the hands of the Great Surgeon to excise anything in your heart and mind that's stunting your spiritual growth. Appreciate the heart of the only One capable of transforming your life.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

We've heard Jesus expose the Pharisees' hypocrisy as He condemned their rigid, legalistic observance of rules over mercy and goodness (Mark 2:23–3:6). They honored the Lord with “their lips” through external rituals, but “their hearts” were far from Him (7:6). In this scene, Jesus taught further about the heart disease of sin and how we must deal with it. His followers were used to listening to the ramblings of the Pharisees about external piety. They had never heard such a radical message!

As we turn to this passage, note that Mark 9:44 and 9:46 do not appear in the most ancient manuscripts. Scribes who copied the text likely felt the need to drive it home by adding these two verses. Translations such as the NIV, NET, and NLT correctly omit those verses in the passage. Now, pay close attention to the warnings that everyone should heed!



Observation: Observing Jesus' Warnings

Approaching a biblical passage correctly requires some observational skills such as looking at the text in context. So, read [Mark 9:42–50](#) thoughtfully and review the full scope of the surrounding verses as you make your observations.¹ Don't try to find the meaning of the passage just yet. Write down elements such as what you can see, touch, and hear. What's repeated and emphasized in the passage?

Terrifying Warnings

Mark 9:42–50

Anytime you come across anything that is repeated, you know you’ve come across something that’s important. In those days, significance wasn’t identified by an exclamation point or an italics font. It was emphasized by repetition.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Pastor Chuck makes some of his own observations. Indicate the clues that support his observations, and write your own comments in the space provided in the table.

Observations—Mark 9:42–48	Clues and Comments
All of these verses are the words of Jesus.	
The identical words, “cause(s) . . . to sin,” appear multiple times. Can you find them? How many?	
There are two categories of those we might cause to sin: “these little ones” and “you.”	
Verses 44 and 46 are omitted. Can you find the reason in your Bible notes?	
The repeated reference to “hell” weaves through the verses, putting emphasis on its lasting and torturous conditions.	

What did Jesus say about testing and salt in 9:49–50? What command did He give to His listeners?

Have salt in yourselves! In other words, stand true to what you believe.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Terrifying Warnings

Mark 9:42–50



Interpretation: Interpreting Jesus' Warnings

In Mark 9:42, Jesus warned whoever might cause “one of these little ones” to sin. The repeated Greek verb for “cause to sin” is *skandalizo*. Look up the word in the dictionary at billmounce.com. What does the word mean?

From the context, can you determine who “these little ones” are? How might someone cause them to sin? How might first-century hearers have understood the radical nature of the offender’s punishment?

This word, skandalizo, means “to destroy the faith of someone, to weaken, to injure, to lead one astray from his or her walk with God resulting in his or her falling even further into deeper sinfulness.” False teachers, cult teachers, strong-willed, smooth-talking speakers who twist and manipulate the truth bring most harm to those who are novices. The point is this person will not have mercy as a result of taking advantage of those who cannot protect or defend themselves.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

In 9:43–47, Jesus used hyperbole to illustrate the seriousness of sin and the importance of rooting it out of our lives. Jesus wasn’t saying that we should literally pluck out our eye or cut off our hand or foot. Rather, He was telling His followers to do whatever it takes to stop sin at the point where it enters our hearts.

Look up the meaning of Jesus’ teaching about sin and hell in your Bible-study resources. Consult Pastor Chuck’s commentary *Insights on Mark* or the online commentary *Constable’s Notes* at netbible.org. Write down what you discover.

Terrifying Warnings

Mark 9:42–50

What we have here is a figure of speech called hyperbole, “an extravagant statement to get one’s point across in a vivid manner.” Jesus was urging a life of holiness and restraint. The radical problem in His mind was people living a life of continued sin. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Explore the various interpretations of Jesus’ statement, “For everyone will be tested with fire” (Mark 9:49) in [Constable’s Notes](#) at netbible.org. What could be the meaning of Jesus’ command in 9:50?

I think the Savior is saying to His listeners, “It is important that you be preservatives in your world, that you be one who causes others to lift their lives to a better plane.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Radical Treatment for the Enemies of Our Soul

Correlating our passage with other passages of Scripture confirms Jesus’ teaching that radical spiritual problems require radical spiritual solutions. How does Paul’s concern for the Corinthians reflect Jesus’ terrifying warnings as you compare [Mark 9:42 with 2 Corinthians 11:3–4, 13–15](#)? What can Christ-followers today learn from these warnings?

It is unconscionable that such people would sway the novice, but they do. It is terrifying to realize how many are duped into further sinfulness because of what they are taught by so-called authorities. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Like a compassionate physician who cares about our total health, Jesus addressed our disease at its source rather than waiting for its symptoms to surface. How does our passage underscore Jesus’ truths in [Mark 7:21–23](#)?

Terrifying Warnings

Mark 9:42–50

What can we learn from passages such as [Genesis 39:7–20](#); [Proverbs 4:23](#); [6:16–35](#); [1 Corinthians 9:24–27](#); and [1 Peter 2:11](#)? Why did Joseph run? Why does Scripture command such radical treatment of the enemies that wage war against our soul?

Take the steps that are necessary. It explains why Paul would write, “I buffet my body” (1 Corinthians 9:27 ASV). The Greek term means “to beat black and blue beneath the eyes.” He was saying, “I punch at myself when I am alone. I push away from those things that could grab my attention and weaken my walk and cultivate a habit I’ll not be able to stop.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Deal with False Teaching and Sin

Applying this passage entails asking questions that will help us take radical steps to deal with false teachings and sins that are sucking the vitality out of our spiritual lives.

In Jesus’ teaching, feet, hands, and eyes represent where we go, what we do, and what we watch—feet that keep on walking into places that do not benefit our soul, hands that click on explicit content on the internet, eyes that have become obsessed with what is not ours. It’s not the members of our bodies but Old Master Sin that can destroy us, using the members of our bodies as instruments to do wicked things (Romans 6:13).

What has the Holy Spirit pinpointed in your life that needs radical treatment? What steps can you take by the power of the Holy Spirit to deal with this sin?

As Jesus’ followers, we ought to make a difference in the lives of those around us. In which of your relationships would you like to be like salt—one who preserves and protects truth and who lifts others to a higher plane in their walk with God?

Terrifying Warnings

Mark 9:42–50

Close your study by thanking God for saving you from sin and its consequences . . . and for His life-changing power at work in you. Use the following space to share your heart with the Great Physician and receive His healing touch.

Let's promote honesty in a world of liars and deception, personify integrity in our businesses, encourage purity in our walk, and clean up the moral world about us—at least in our own circle since we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your Word. Help me guard my heart. Thank You for Your power at work in me to deal with the enemies of my soul. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page "*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*" at insight.org.

For the 2026–2027 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2011, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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Study 17 • Page 7

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