

The Gospel of Mark

Part 32


Generosity of Spirit

TALKING POINTS WALKING POINTS

Leaders' Guide

2024.7.21



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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- 1 What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?
- 2 Review the **first** full page of the **Sermon Summary**. Discuss what you learn about the broad range of doctrines which genuine Christians hold—and the limits we must circumscribe around true doctrines.
- 3 { Now review the **second** page of the **Sermon Summary**. What did you learn about hell?
How does your historical understanding of hell compare to the biblical data?
- 4 Hell is **not** in the cards for true Christians, but we **will** be "salted with fire". How have you experienced that?
- 5 Read Mark 9:38-42. Note the following three main groups of people, and mark them in distinctive ways:
[1] "Someone/him/he" (v. 38-39).
[2] "Us" (aka, the disciples) (see v. 38 & 40).
[3] "He who/whoever" (v. 40-42).
- 6 What do you observe about the interplay of these three groups? What principles can you discern?
- 7 Read Mark 9:43-48. Here Jesus turns his spotlight on "group 2"—his followers. Surprise—these cautions are directed toward those who claim to follow Christ! Does that shock you? Why or why not?
- 8 Read Matthew 5:20 & 7:21-23. What light do these passages shed on Jesus' warnings in Mark 9:43-48?
- 9 Jesus calls those who claim to be his followers to "cut off and pluck out", to "deal drastically with sin". Tell us about someone you know who was **unwilling** to make a costly choice for the sake of righteousness.
- 10 Tell about a time when you chose to make a costly choice for the sake of righteousness.
- 11 With what situations are you currently grappling? How can we help you make hard choices?

1 Standard “starter question”—you know what to do.

2 In preparation for leading the discussion on this question, you can also review “Monday” and “Tuesday” from the “Digging Deeper” feature. (**Don’t** go there with your group—or you’ll never get through today’s Community Group meeting! But you can urge them to “Dig Deeper” on their own.)

3 You likely will need to “prime the pump”, so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)

4 ditto

5 38 John said to Him, “Teacher, we saw **someone** casting out demons in Your name, and we tried to prevent **him** because **he** was not following **us**.”
39 But Jesus said, “Do not hinder **him**, for there is **no one** who will perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me.
40 “For **he** who is not against **us** is for **us**.
41 “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.
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.

- 6
- There’s a lot of confusion and tension, such as:
“Who is that who’s casing out demons?”
“Why are you trying to stop me? I’m doing a good thing.”
 - There is a lot of pride in both of the above sentiments.
 - Generally applicable principles (eg. v. 40-42) can and should be extracted from specific events (v. 38-39)—but only when the Scriptures guide us so that we know **what** principle to extract. Context is King! Look at Matthew 12:30a. The exact opposite conclusion could have been drawn from this situation! Caution is needed.

7 Help your group grapple with the fact that followers of Christ can become seriously side-tracked. Sin is serious. Sin is insidious. Sin must be dealt with quickly and ruthlessly. “Be killing sin—or sin will kill you!” (Romans 6:11–14)

8 Although all who end up in heaven will have professed faith in Christ (Romans 10:9), not all who profess faith in Christ will end up in heaven (Matthew 7:21-23)! This is a sobering and terrifying reality with which all those who profess faith **must** grapple.

9 You likely will need to “prime the pump”, so be prepared with your own answer to this question. (But wait for others to think and answer. Check your watch—20 seconds feels like an eternity!)

10 ditto

11 ditto

Sermon Summary Mark 9:38-50

We are working our way through Mark's Gospel. If you are counting, today's message is the 26th installment! We should finish before 2025. In today's text, the disciples encounter a stranger who is using Jesus' name to free people from demonic influence. Clearly he is a Christ follower, but they try to quash his ministry simply "...because he was not following us" (v. 38). Put it this way: "Master, we tried to stop him from ministering because he doesn't go to TCC. He goes to Hope Community Church. Because he doesn't go to our church, his ministry is suspect. We had to put a stop to that!" That's what's going on here! In fact what we see here is the organic growth of the church.

Jesus taught, preached and healed everywhere and people followed him. That's a good thing! The organic growth of Christianity always outpaces the organizational growth of Christianity. That is one of the reasons there are so many churches out there. Christianity grows faster than your group. It self-organizes somewhere else. The disciples had to learn to get used to this. It is a natural byproduct of people sharing their faith. We have to learn to accept those outside of our little group as genuine followers of Jesus. This happened over and over again. Think about the Apostle Paul. He came to faith in Christ and the disciples had to learn to accept him as a brother in faith. It is a natural consequence of a spreading faith. In the early church there was this guy named Apollos who was teaching the Scriptures and he was getting a few things wrong. So some believers pulled him aside and instructed him a little bit and turned him loose again! Apollos wasn't really part of the Apostle's group or Paul's group, he was doing his own thing—but still following Jesus. The work of God is bigger than what is happening at this church. And that is a good thing! It's beautiful.

Jesus said: "Don't hinder him." Among churches, we need a spirit of cooperation, not competition. We praise God wherever the gospel is being preached. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are part of the same family! This passage points out the problem we have to overcome: the problem of suspicion. Maybe that group over here worships a little different than we do. Their preaching style isn't what we're used to. They dress differently. Stuff like that. But we have the same Bible, the same Jesus, the same Holy Spirit, the same God as Father. They seem to be expressing the same truth of Christianity, but it's different. So we get suspicious. In light of Jesus' teaching here, we need to be suspicious about our suspicions.

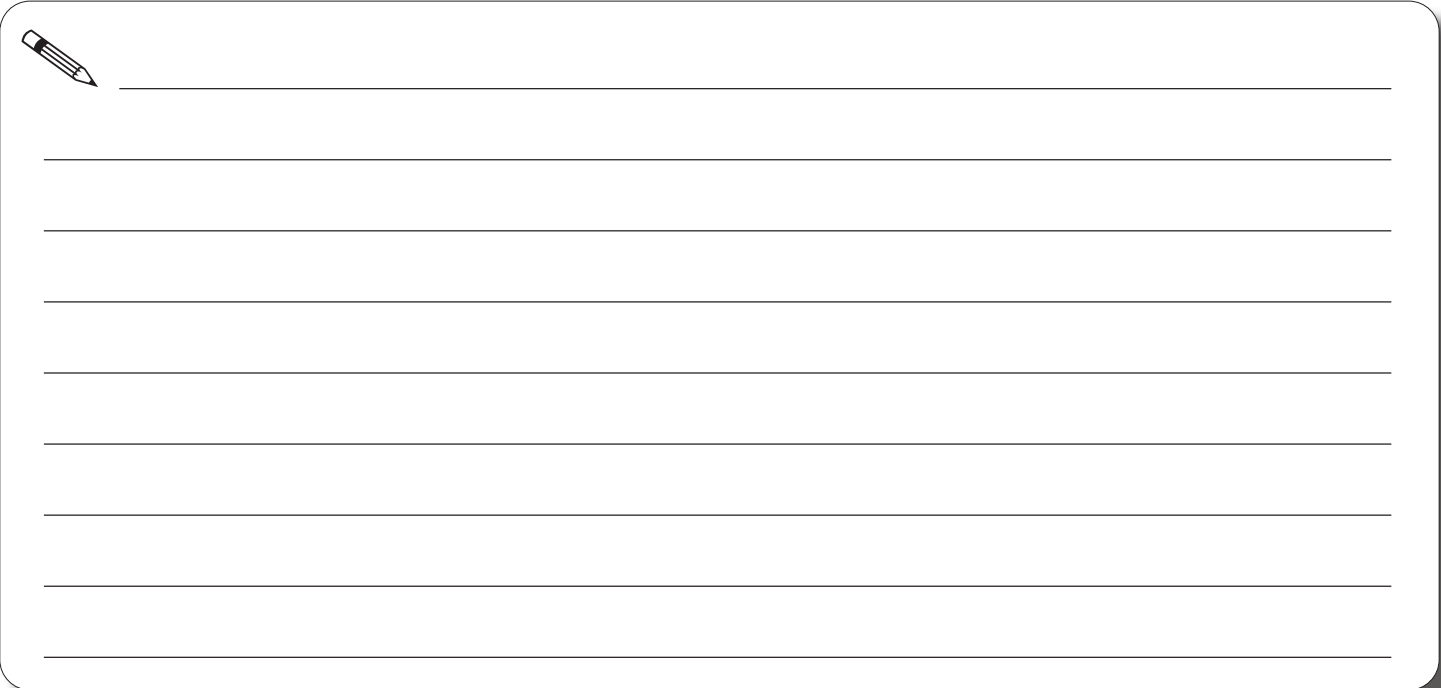
Remember that the disciples had just been arguing about who was the greatest—perhaps they saw themselves as the guardians of Christianity. But the organic growth of the church often outpaces its ability to organize it and regulate it. The disciples needed to learn that. We need to learn it too. Now, it is true that there are certain truths one must hold to be a true Christian. One must believe in the deity of Christ, that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose from the dead three days later. One must believe that salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. To be a Christian you must hold to these truths. But we can disagree on a lot of other things and still be brothers and sisters in the faith. We can worship in different ways and on different days. We can have different views of the end times. Of course, we should seek to be as Biblical as we can be in the outworking of our faith. But this passage argues for a greater inclusiveness than many of us are comfortable with.

There are two errors we can fall into: in a desire to be inclusive we can embrace false teaching. We must not do that. But we also must not reject true Christians just because we are suspicious of them. We should treat them as brothers and sisters until we have good reason not to. Jesus taught that we are to show hospitality to Christian workers (v. 41). But the disciples didn't do that (v. 38). How many opportunities do we miss? Even a cup of water is reward-worthy! We need to cultivate generosity toward missionaries and other Christians outside our normal circle. They are part of our family and we need to show the world that the family of God takes care of itself. Not to the neglect of others, but first to take care of our own (Galatians 6:10).

Moving on to v. 42-48, we encounter a very important concept: “stumbling”. It is a broad term that describes a number of ways that a believer’s walk with God can be compromised. In Mark 4:17 people “fall away” due to affliction or religious persecution. We can even cause ourselves to “stumble” (v. 43-48). Jesus is clear: no sin should be so precious to us that we would be willing to go to hell to have it. Do whatever it takes to loosen sin’s grip so that you escape this horrible judgment. No sin is worth hell. Salvation is offered to all who place their trust in Jesus as their sin bearer. But make no mistake about it. Hell is a justified punishment for rebelling against a Holy God. Jesus believed in hell. He spoke more about hell than he did heaven. The imagery used here may be metaphorical, but the reality is harsher than the metaphor.

Jesus speaks of “unquenchable fire”; a judgment that is everlasting. In the last 30 years or so there has been a movement in the church to replace the Biblical teaching of hell with something called “annihilationism”. As attractive as it sounds to avoid hell by ceasing to exist, this teaching simply lacks biblical support. Hell is “eternal fire” (Matthew 25:41), “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12), “eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46), “torment” (Revelation 14:10–11), a “bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:1–2), the “second death” (Revelation 21:8), and “eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:9). Hell is not a place that you want to find yourself. No sin is so pleasurable that you should be willing to go to hell to have it. Our problem is that we are so focused on this world, that we ignore the next. We do so to our peril. Jesus constantly tried to wake people up to hell’s reality (Luke 12:16-21; Mark 8:36-37).

True believers will never be “thrown” into the fire (v. 43-48), but everyone will be “salted” (sprinkled) with fire (v. 49-50). Suffering and trials come to all, and their purpose is to season and improve us, to grow us in our faith (James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7). Trials bring good. Allow them to have their seasoning, character enriching effect on your life. Allow them to produce in you a generosity of spirit that stands ready both to serve the least of these, and is welcoming of other believers who may not be part of your group. How do we apply all of this? [1] Develop a more ecumenical spirit towards your brothers and sisters in Christ whose worship tradition is different from yours. [2] Recognize that no sin should be so cherished, that you would choose it over placing your trust in Christ as your Savior. [3] Allow Jesus' teaching about hell to motivate you in personal evangelism. [4] Beware of doing anything that might cause other people to stumble in their faith.




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Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

There are certain truths one must hold in order to be a true Christian.

But we can disagree on a lot of other things and still be brothers and sisters in the faith. There are two errors we can fall into: in a desire to be inclusive we can embrace false teaching. We must not do that. But we also must not reject true Christians who are different from us. By doing "theological triage", we can uphold essential doctrines while preserving unity.

Monday—Study this image, which depicts the distinctions between doctrines which are essential to salvation—those at the golden center, marked with .

List the doctrines which you think one **must** believe in order to be saved. Can you support your list with Scripture. We need to!

Why is this circle small, while by comparison the others are quite large?

Tuesday—Other doctrines exist for which genuine Christians can disagree.

But know this: not all of those doctrines are equally clear, or equally important.

Let's get an overview of the distinctions between doctrines which lie **beyond** the core of essentials.

- Look at the blue circle. Doctrines in this area are "Important, but **Non-Essential**".
- Notice the pink circle, the "disputed doctrines". Genuine Christians hold differing views on these. (Do you also notice that the border between blue and pink circles is fuzzy? That's because there's no universally agreed-upon "cut-off point" between doctrines which are "important but not essential" and those which are "disputed"—for which there is no clear and certain consensus.)
- The outer edge of "disputed doctrines", however, is **not** fuzzy. There are some doctrines which lie **beyond** mainstream Christian circles. Google the definition of "heterodox". What do you learn?
- Beyond the circle of heterodoxy lies heresy. **No** genuine believers hold these views. (The line between heterodoxy and heresy is dashed, rather than solid. The distinction between these views hardly matters—all of them are beyond what Christians may legitimately believe.)

Wednesday—Focus today on the blue circle of doctrines which are important, but **not** essential to salvation. What doctrines would **you** place in this circle—and **why**?

Why is it important to have convictions about doctrines which are **not** essential to salvation?

Have you ever belonged to a church in which you agreed on little more than the essentials? Didn't work very well, did it? It is typically the doctrines in the blue circle which determine our "fit".

Thursday—Focus today on the pink circle of disputed doctrines. If you've ever left a church over a doctrinal disagreement (most of us change churches because our preferences are not met ☹) — you've encountered doctrines in the pink circle of "disputed doctrines". What were those doctrines?

Friday—Who do you know who holds heterodox or heretical views? Are you able to fellowship together? What are some of those doctrines?

Saturday—Review the entire diagram again. What have you learned this week?

How might it impact your tolerance for genuine Christians who are different from you?

How might it increase your intolerance for false doctrines which are deceiving and destroying lives?

