(29) And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. (30) And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell. (Matt. 5:29-30 ASV.)
(6) But whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea. (7) Woe unto the world because of occasions of stumbling! for it must needs be that the occasions come; but woe to that man through whom the occasion cometh! (8) And if thy hand or thy foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed or halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. (9) And if thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire. (Matt. 18:6-9 ASV.)

The literal meaning is clear. Jesus says a “believer in me” can “stumble.” (Mark 9:42: Matt. 18:6.) Jesus repetitively tells “you” that if you stumble, you had better cut off the body part causing you to sin or you will go to hell whole. In its most succinct sense, this teaches ‘heaven maimed or hell whole.’

In-Depth Exposition

If you sin against God’s standards, Jesus required “cutting off the body parts” that cause you to be “ensnared in sin” or you will be sent to hell. (Matthew 5:29, Matthew 18:8, and Mark 9:42-48.) You can go to “heaven maimed” or “hell whole.” Jesus specifically said this principle applies to “believers in me who become ensnared (or stumble).” (Mark 9:42; Matt. 18:6.) Jesus described the steps needed as ‘cutting off the body part ensnaring you to sin.’

What does this passage mean?
First, does “cutting off body parts” mean more than merely *sorrow for sin*?

Yes, for Jesus taught one needs to actually take urgent steps to *destroy the object from which the temptation grows*. Jesus is pointing to physical steps consistent with an antecedent mental sorrow. Thus, Jesus insists that for “believers in me” who are “ensnared” that if they wish to go to heaven, they must do so actually “maimed.” Clearly, in context, Jesus is not talking about merely changing your mind about sin (*i.e.*, sorrow for sin). Nor is Jesus talking about changing your mind about Himself — faith. Rather, Jesus is talking about taking *active* measures to *prevent sin* in the future. You will then become obedient.

What are these steps? Are they a species of *works worthy of repentance*? Is it successful obedience? Or is it literally *separating from yourself the causes of temptation* to make repeating sin impossible? We must search this out carefully. Jesus made your salvation *absolutely indispensable* on these steps: it is heaven maimed or hell whole. There is no third option for a “believer ensnared in sin” to go to heaven by faith alone. Thus, it is imperative to find Jesus’ meaning for the good of our own souls.

If you have lived with the cheap grace gospel in your consciousness as long as I have (over twenty-five years), then I venture to say this chapter will do you the most good. Why? Because Jesus is going to give you in these passages the medicine your soul needs so desperately to stay healthy and saved.
The Skandalon

We will now quote the same passages you read at the outset. However, this time, we will reveal the Greek verb *skandalizo* and the Greek noun *skandalon*. It is absolutely essential to note these words and their meaning to understand Jesus’ message. So please read these verses one more time:

(42) And whosoever shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble (*skandalizo*), it were better for him if a great millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. (43) And if thy [your] hand cause thee to stumble (*skandalizo*), cut it off: it is good for thee [you] to enter into life maimed, rather than having thy two hands to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire. (44) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (45) And if thy [your] foot cause thee [you] to stumble (*skandalizo*), cut it off: it is good for thee [you] to enter into life halt, rather than having thy two feet to be cast into hell. (46) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (47) And if thine [your] eye cause thee [you] to stumble (*skandalizo*), cast it out: it is good for thee [you] to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell; (48) where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (Mar 9:42-48 ASV.)

Jesus repeats this in Matthew. He says:

(7) Woe unto the world because of offences (*skandalon*, plural)! for it must needs be that offences (*skandalon*) come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! (8) Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend (*skandalizo*) thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two
feet to be cast into everlasting fire. (9) And if thine eye offend (skandalizo) thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. (Mat 18:7-9 ASV.)

The Picture Of A Box Trap Missing In English

To understand Jesus here it is useful to note that the Greek word translated as stumble is from the Greek verb skandalizo. Our English word scandalized comes from it. Its best translation here is entrapped. And when the passage in Matthew speaks of offences, it uses the plural of skandalon. It means here snares.

A skandalon in Greek literally meant the wooden stick that would hold up one edge of a metal box-trap. (See diagram on page 47 and photo on page 54.) Food would be put under the box. An animal would be tempted by the food to enter the trap. Then the hunter would stay a significant distance away, hidden from view. The hunter would then use a small string that was holding the skandalon stick. The hunter would pull on the string, causing the skandalon stick to collapse. The box-trap would fall, and the animal’s whole body would normally be trapped inside. The animal would be skandlizo-ed.

It is absolutely essential to understand the skandalon in order to understand Jesus’ message. For sometimes an animal could escape the metal trap by letting a limb be ripped off. For example, if the trap fell on a tail. Or only on a leg. Or only on an arm. The animal would be trapped only partially. Before the hunter would run over, the animal would begin a desperate struggle for its life. By a great force of will to live, the animal would release itself from the trap by using its free limbs to pull away. In that process of pulling away, the animal would tear off the body part that was pinned under the metal trap. The animal would run away, maimed but still alive.
Jesus’ reference to this hunting-picture is clear from the message quoted above. In verses 43 and 45 of Mark 9, Jesus says you should “cut off” the body part ensnaring yourself. The word He uses is the verb form of the noun skandalon. You should behave like the animal that is ensnared (skandalizo-ed) by a single body part. Suffer the loss of a limb but live rather than hold onto the limb and be taken and killed by the hunter. The hunting imagery makes Jesus’ meaning plain.

The Picture of Salvation At Stake For “Scandalized” Believers Is Unmistakable

Jesus is very concerned about those “believers” in him who become “skandlizo-ed.” (Mark 9:42; Matt. 18:6.) Rather than Jesus telling us no Christian believer can ever become skandalizo-ed, Jesus bewails those who “shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble....” i.e., be skandalizo-ed. (Mark 9:42; Matt.18:6.)

What is the price that one of these “believers in me” must pay for being skandalizo-ed? Jesus repeats three times the price is damnation.

**TABLE 1. The Price Of Being Entrapped (Skandalizo-ed)(Mk 9)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKANDALIZO-ED</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If thy hand cause thee to stumble, i.e., be entrapped (skandalizo-ed.)</td>
<td>[You with] thy hands... go into hell, into the unquenchable fire (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If thy foot causes thee to stumble,i.e., be entrapped (skandalizo-ed.)</td>
<td>[You] having thy feet [are] cast into hell where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (45-46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If thy eye causes thee to stumble,i.e., be entrapped (skandalizo-ed.)</td>
<td>[You with] two eyes [are] cast into hell; where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. (47-48)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Is One Saved In Jesus’ Lesson?

Jesus could not be more clear about the price of salvation for the “believer in me” who has become “ensnared” (skandalizo-ed). It is stern measures of the most severe sort.

TABLE 2. The Means of Entering Heaven In Mark 9:42-48

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONDITION</th>
<th>RESULT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[If] cut it off (i.e., hand causing you to be ensnared)</td>
<td>[You] enter into life maimed. (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[If] cut it off (i.e., foot causing you to be ensnared)</td>
<td>[You] enter into life halt (45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[If] cast it out (i.e., eye causing you to be ensnared)</td>
<td>[You] enter into the kingdom of God with one eye (47)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Stern Measure Given The Young Rich Man

In Jesus’ answer to the young rich man’s question on how to have eternal life, Jesus first tells the young man to “obey the commandments (i.e., the Ten Commandments).” (Matthew 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-26.)

Then, when the young man says he has obeyed it, Jesus next gives the young man a heaven-maimed command:

Jesus said unto him, If thou wouldest be perfect (teleios, mature, complete), go, sell that which thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. (Matt. 19:21 ASV.)

There is no command in Scripture that one is not permitted to have wealth. But Jesus is insisting that this particular man give all his wealth to the poor. Why? Jesus’ word choice indicates that this is how this particular young man will reach a completed and perfect state.
Isn’t this a stern measure? The man was very wealthy, the text says. What problem does wealth by itself cause, even if obtained legitimately?

Jesus once said:

No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matt. 6:24 ASV)

Jesus in Revelation speaks similarly, saying that riches blocked the productivity of the church members at Laodicea.

(16) So because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth. (17) Because thou sayest, I am rich, and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: (Rev. 3:16-17 ASV.)

Jesus in the Parable of the Sower speaks similarly of the third seed. Its productivity is blocked by riches. Let’s do a brief review of the Parable of the Sower on this issue.

In that parable, the first seed rejects the word and never believes. (Luke 8:12.) The second seed “believes for a while” but then falls into temptation and withers (dies). (Luke 8:13.) The third seed goes much farther in growth, but then is choked by thorns. Jesus tells us what are those thorns:

And that which fell among the thorns, these are they that have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. (Luke 8:14 ASV.)

Thus, repeatedly, Jesus says that riches can block productivity. Riches become thorns and hence a snare. The root problem is that riches become one’s priority, causing you to not produce for the Lord.
How do these passages help us understand the heaven-maimed or hell-whole statement?

Because Jesus evidently is giving the young rich man a cure that will prevent his serving his mammon any longer. By giving away all his wealth to the poor, and becoming poor himself, the young man will put an end to the source of his temptation. The rich man if turned poor can now become rich toward God.

In this example from Jesus’ ministry, the physical object that needed to be destroyed was the wealth itself. The desire for riches made the young rich man seek its service, not God’s service. The young man has sacrificed productivity to God in good works because they often cost money to do. Thus, the young rich man may think he has not transgressed any commands among the Ten Commandments. But the affirmative commands elsewhere in the Law of charity (good works) were being ignored. Productivity in good works are being sacrificed to the god of mammon that the young man loved.

Thus, heaven maimed for this young man meant cutting off his connection to his accumulated wealth. Starting over will give him a new outlook where God’s works are his goal rather than serving mammon.

Conclusion

Jesus’ hell-whole or heaven maimed warning is in stark contrast to the Modern Gospel of Cheap Grace. Jesus says unless you buffet your body to avoid sinning you will later be rejected. (Mark 9:42-48.) A Christian believer who is ensnared has only two choices: heaven maimed or hell whole. There is no compromising idea that faith or some initial obedience is all that matters. Jesus demands success. The price of heaven is precisely success in avoiding sin. You must take whatever measures that achieve this or you will suffer hell forever. Jesus is blunt.
Costa Rican boy creates a classic animal trap, designed to capture birds. The stick is the *skandalon*. The corn serves to entice the bird to enter. This is the imagery Jesus meant by His use of the noun *skandalon* and the verb *skandalizo*. When the string attached to the *skandalon* is pulled, the trap is sprung. If the bird is only partially pinned, it has to let go of bird feathers or limbs in order to escape.