

Luke 17:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

Analysis

The severity of judgment: 'It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.' The comparison is stark: being drowned with 'a millstone' (λίθος μυλικός, lithos mylikos)—a massive grinding stone—'hanged about his neck' (περικειται περὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτοῦ, perikeitai peri ton trachēlon autou) and cast into the sea would be preferable to causing 'one of these little ones' (ἔνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων, hena tōn mikrōn toutōn) to stumble. 'Little ones' can refer to children or humble believers. The hyperbole emphasizes judgment's severity: better physical death than spiritual devastation of causing others to sin. Those who lead others into sin face worse eternal punishment than drowning.

Historical Context

In first-century Palestine, millstones were large, heavy grinding stones turned by donkeys. Being tied to one and thrown in the sea ensured drowning—death was certain and quick. Jesus says this horrible death would be preferable to the judgment awaiting those who cause believers to stumble. This teaching radically elevates the seriousness of influence. Parents, teachers, pastors, and all Christians bear responsibility for how their words and actions affect others' faith. The phrase 'little ones' may particularly refer to new or weak believers who are especially vulnerable to being scandalized by inconsistent teaching or hypocritical living.

Hell's torment exceeds the worst physical suffering—thus even drowning is preferable.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does this hyperbolic comparison emphasize the severity of judgment for causing others to stumble spiritually?
2. What responsibility do mature Christians bear for protecting newer or weaker believers from stumbling?
3. How should this warning shape Christian social media use, entertainment choices, and public behavior?

Interlinear Text

λυσιτελεῖ αὐτοῦ εἰ μύλος ὄνικὸς περίκειται περὶ τὸν
It were better for him that a millstone G3684 were hanged about G3588

τράχηλον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔρριπται εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν ἢ
neck for him and he cast into the sea than G2228

ἴνα σκανδαλίσῃ ἔνα τῶν μικρῶν τούτων
that he should offend one G3588 little ones of these G5130

Additional Cross-References

Mark 9:42 (Parallel theme): And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

Matthew 18:14 (Parallel theme): Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Matthew 18:10 (Parallel theme): Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

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