

HAVE SALT IN YOURSELVES

Luke 14:35

Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Mark 9:49-50

"For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavour, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another."

Matt 5:13

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men."

What is the Symbolic Meaning of Salt and a Covenant of Salt?

SALT

'Common salt is considered by most authorities as an essential ingredient of our food. The ancients appreciated the value of salt for seasoning food. So necessary was it that they dignified it by making it a requisite part of sacrifices. The Arabic word for "salt" and for a "compact" or "treaty" is the same.' *Extract from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia.*

Examples:

"And every offering of your grain offering you shall season with salt; you shall not allow the salt of the covenant of your God to be lacking from your grain offering. With all your offerings you shall offer salt." Lev 2:13.

"When you have finished cleansing it, you shall offer a young bull without blemish, and a ram from the flock without blemish. When you offer them before the LORD, the priests shall throw salt on them, and they will offer them up as a burnt offering to the LORD." Ezek 43:23-24.

"All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and daughters with you as an ordinance forever; it is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD with you and your descendants with you." Num 18:19.

"Should you not know that the LORD God of Israel gave the dominion over Israel to David forever, to him and his sons, by a covenant of salt?" 2 Chr 13:5.

COVENANT OF SALT

In Num 18:19; and 2 Chr 13:5, a "covenant of salt" is mentioned. As salt was regarded as a necessary ingredient of the daily food, and so of all sacrifices offered to Yahweh, it became an easy step to the very close connection between salt and covenant-making. When men ate together they became friends. Compare the Arabic expression, "There is salt between us"; "He has eaten of my salt," which means partaking of hospitality which cemented friendship. Covenants were generally confirmed by sacrificial meals and salt was always present. Since, too, salt is a preservative, it would easily become symbolic of an enduring covenant. So offerings to Yahweh were to be

by a statute forever, "a covenant of salt for ever before Yahweh" <Num 18:19>. David received his kingdom forever from Yahweh by a "covenant of salt" <2 Chr 13:5>. In the light of these conceptions the remark of Our Lord becomes the more significant: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another" <Mk 9:50>. *Extract from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia.*

Figurative:

Salt is emblematic of the utmost loyalty. In almost all early societies, a person entering into a covenant with another person was bound to honour the covenant for the rest of their lives—even to suffer death rather than break it. A person who has once joined in a "salt covenant" of total commitment with God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and then breaks it, is fit only to be cast out. **"It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out."** This is because saltlessness typifies disloyalty and barrenness.

Further words which describe the figurative meaning of salt, and are more often applied to our Christian living are, commitment, consecration, steadfastness and patient endurance.

THE TWO AREAS WHERE SALTINESS OR LOYALTY TO CHRIST ARE HIGHLIGHTED

1. In Christian Service—In Ministry for Christ to Members of the Body

These are the verses preceding Luke's reading.

"If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, [to hate in this sense is to put family interests before the Lord's will] yes, and his own life [all of his self interests] also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross [lay down his self life] and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it-- lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Luke 14:26-35.

These verses speak of having a commitment to finish what we have started in our spiritual walk—in ministries allotted to us by Christ, and in our desire to minister to the needs of our fellow Christians, and those outside the Church.

Ministry in the body of Christ is not restricted to the main ministries of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers, nor in the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Cor 12. The essence of Christian ministry is love for the brethren, and giving up of self-life in helping others. It is demonstrated in the selfless love and devotion of a wife as she rears God-fearing children, and in her obedience and support of her husband. It is seen in reaching out to lost souls, in giving, in hospitality, in participating in fellowship meetings, in visiting and ministering healing to the sick, in comforting the downcast, and in encouraging the young and fainthearted. Paul lists some of these ministries as gifts bestowed on individuals for the sake of others.

“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.” Rom 12:6-13.

In the equivalent reading in Matthew’s gospel, Jesus also parallels having salt in oneself to doing good works, and by so doing, being a light to the world.

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.” Jesus goes on to tell why they are the salt of the earth. “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matt 5:11-16.

In general the Christian walk is one of putting our self-life on the cross so that Jesus is able to live in us, and to minister through us in meeting the needs of the body. That is why He said, “**If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.**”

When a person tires of losing his life for the sake of Christ, and re-establishes the pattern of his former life, by returning to fulfilling the demands of his flesh, he is said to have lost his saltiness, and is good for nothing. “...**whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple. Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!**” Jesus also issued this stern warning: “**If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.**” John 15:6.

Remembering that having salt in ourselves is equated with loyalty to the Lord, commitment, consecration, steadfastness and patient endurance, we should take careful heed to the warnings in the following readings, which are but a few of many in the Scriptures.

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...” Heb 12:1.

“No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.” 2 Tim 2:4.

“Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” Mark 4:18-19.

"But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Luke 21:34-36.

2. A Commitment to Holiness--the Path of the Cross--Being Seasoned by Fire

The following verses precede Mark's reading:

"But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to sin [what you are doing], cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. And if your foot causes you to sin [where you frequent], cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched-- where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' And if your eye causes you to sin [the manner of your looking], pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire-- where 'Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt. Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavour, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace [to live in peace and harmony] with one another.'" Mark 9:42-50.

This reading speaks of purity and holiness. Obviously the language is figurative. The Lord was not suggesting that we literally cut off a hand, a leg, or pluck out an eye. The starkness of the figurative language and its reference to hell add to the seriousness we should have in our commitment to pursuing holiness. It certainly throws doubt on the comfortable assertion that "once saved always saved." However, to come to a right understanding of the reading we must not minimize the dire warning, but at the same time study it with a reverential fear of dishonouring God's holy name by presenting Him as harsh and judgmental.

There is a stark warning about having no real desire for personal purity or spiritual growth in holiness. But even though the warning is so forthright, it is entirely justified due to the complacency of man, and the ease with which he is drawn into fulfilling the desires of the flesh. Because it is so blunt, we could conclude that if we fall short we shall be cast into hell, however, that would be denigrating the name of God.

It is essential that we view the reading in the light of God's loving forbearance. God's throne is founded in justice and righteousness, and He cannot turn His back on sin and iniquity. But above all God is a God of loving kindness, forbearance, mercy and grace, not willing that any should perish, but that all should know His forgiveness and blessing through repentance. The parable of the prodigal son bears witness to this. It is out of loving concern for mankind that Christ issues the above warning, that none should fall. And it is in this light that He warned His twelve disciples.

"Beware of the leaven [their religiosity which is likened to leaven] of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy [which if partaken of, pervades the whole spiritual outlook]. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light,

and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. " Luke 12:1-7

Jesus warned His disciples about the Pharisees, who made a public profession of their religion, but which was in fact lacking in love and spirituality. He warned them of partaking of their false religion. They were to be apostles of witness, and their teaching had to be above reproach. What they spoke in private behind closed doors would be proclaimed abroad and influence multitudes of people in ages to come. They were therefore warned that with such a responsibility, their correction would be so much sterner. They were to walk softly before God, fearing Him rather those who would persecute them. They were to instruct and teach in the fear of God. His warning about fearing God who could cast into hell was particularly relevant to His twelve disciples, in that Jesus knew beforehand that Judas would eventually betray Him, and suffer that fate. But here is the balance. Once He has rightly warned them, Jesus assured them of God's love -- that they were so precious to Him that even the very hairs on their head were numbered.

The following readings also illustrate the love and forbearance of God, and His desire for wayward man to repent and return to Him.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:16-17.

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, [concerning the end of the world] as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet 3:9.

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I [Paul] am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." 1 Tim 1:15-16.

"If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared." Ps 130:3-4.

"Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" Rom 2:4.

Other Warnings of Losing Our Salvation

The following readings also warn about loosing our saltiness or commitment to holiness and the works of the Lord -- of backsliding or being saved and then resting on our lees. Our very salvation is thrown into jeopardy.

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew

them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.” Heb 6:4-6.

“For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.” Heb 10:26-27.

“For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning [before they were saved].” 2 Pet 2:20.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither [habitual] fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Cor 6:9-10.

“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” Phil 2:12.

Be Cast into Hell-- Their Worm Does not die—The Fire is Not Quenched

Again we should remember that the language is figurative. The “worm” symbolises torment, and “fire” is consistently associated with judgment.

Despite the language associated with hell being mostly figurative, most people conjure up a picture of people being cast into a literal lake of fire, where they suffer eternal agony from literal flames. Taking the figurative language into account, it is more appropriate to see hell as a total separation -- of being cast out of all that is associated with God’s kingdom, and entry into an eternal existence in Satan’s kingdom.

The prospect is horrifying. In God’s kingdom we have a loving Father who continually watches over us for our welfare. Paul writes of our Christian walk in this manner: **“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things.”** Phil 4:8.

By comparison, Satan is a liar and a murderer. Jesus described him as such. **“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”** John 8:44. This suggests that he would exact slavish obedience and worship by force.

Those in hell would be accompanied by every type of demon spirit, every type of criminal, every vile and self-seeking person, and overall, an aura of suspicion, mistrust, violence, jealousy, hatred, and fear. The worm of torment would be the imprisoned heart crying out in despair, ‘I don’t belong here—why didn’t I listen while I had the chance.’ But the fire of judgment does not go out—the torment of their situation in Satan’s kingdom is for eternity. No wonder the Lord Jesus Christ issued such stark warnings.

Seasoned With Fire

In Mark 9:49 Jesus says, **“...everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt.”**

By “everyone,” Jesus means every follower of Mine
“every sacrifice” is not everyone in general, but those who have given up their self-lives to the death, and have willingly submitted to God’s refining hand.
“seasoned with fire” means the fiery trials of refinement that are necessary to season a person, or impart the salt of total commitment to him.

Teaching about the necessity of refining tribulation and suffering to purge out the leaven of carnal flesh is not popular, but its truth is confirmed in the following readings.

“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.” Heb 12:6-10.

In Revelation, Jesus says, **“As many as I love, I rebuke [admonish] and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”** Rev 3:19-20.

“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.” Mal 3:2-3.

“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from [the controlling power of] sin...” 1 Pet 4:1.

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together [to be approved together].” Rom 8:16-17.

Cutting Off and Plucking Out

In the reading in Mark 9, Jesus warned that if our hand or foot sinned, we were to “**cut it off,**” and if our eye caused us to sin we were to “**pluck it out.**” Because the language is figurative, we must ask ourselves how we are to rid ourselves of the sin associated with the offending members. The answer lies in the application of the spiritual blessings Jesus procured for us in His death on the cross, and His triumphant resurrection to the right hand of the Father.

In the sixth chapter of Romans, Paul makes it clear that since Jesus represented mankind on the cross, we are united with Him in His death and resurrection. He wrote,

“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness

of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin.” Rom 6:3-7.

“Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” Rom 6:11-13.

“I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.” Rom 6:19.

In order to cut off or pluck out the offending members that cause us to sin, we must believe that spiritually our ‘old man,’ or sin nature was crucified in Jesus on the cross. What we claim by faith, if our heart is right, the Holy Spirit makes real in practice. We are to put off the arm, leg, or eye [in reality the sin that is associated with them], declaring it crucified in Jesus on the cross, and put on Jesus Christ, presenting our members to Him as instruments of righteousness. In this light, Paul writes, “... **put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.**” Eph 4:22-24.

This is rightly a spiritual exercise, for it is only by the Spirit that the deeds of the flesh can be put to death. “**For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.** For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Rom 8:13-14.

Commitment to Holiness

In the reading in Mark 9, we are directed to have salt in ourselves, or a total commitment in this case to the direction of holiness. We are to be committed to a pathway of continual growth in holiness.

“Therefore “**Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty... Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**” 2 Cor 6:17-7:1.

“**For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.**” 1Thes 4:7-8.

Have Peace With One Another

Finally, Paul entreats us to live in peace and harmony with each other. This is a natural consequence of pursuing holiness. By comparison, “**the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked."**” Isa 57:20-21.