
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.

(Mark 9:49–50)

Introduction

Of the forty or fifty calls to one another one another in the New Testament, this is the first occurrence, and therefore it sets the precedent for how we should approach these instructions given to the community of faith. This particular instruction to “have peace with one another” is, in principle, repeated in 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13, although the words “one another” are not expressly used there. In a red-letter edition of the Bible, these words in our text will be all red, signifying that they were spoken by Jesus. The preceding verses establish the context for us.

Context is vital to our understanding and appreciation of the instruction. Jesus had returned to what would have been as close to a home as he would have had—in Capernaum. After a long journey by foot, he and his disciples finally arrived at home and then Jesus decided to do a bit of discipleship. In vv. 33–35 we read,

Then he came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, “What was it you disputed among yourselves on the road?” But they kept silent, for on the road they had disputed among themselves who would be the greatest. And he sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.”

In the context of the disciples being self-interested, selfish, and not caring for the others in their community of faith, and Jesus wanting to instruct their hearts and correct their perspective, we have our first injunction towards one anothering.

A Fascinating Insight

There is a fascinating insight into human hearts, just as many of you have witnessed with young children. Just the mere question, “What were you thinking?” is enough to reveal their corrupt hearts and bring appropriate guilt, not just for the offence, but also for the manner in which that offence was delivered. Just like us, the disciples knew that what they were doing was inappropriate and not conducive to the unity and well-being of their community, but they still went ahead and did so.

Often, personal satisfaction and desire trump corporate unity and purpose. Jesus, knowing their hearts and their general proclivity to sin and selfishness, began to show them the

right way to regard one another and indeed work with one another so that the kingdom may advance.

This brings us to our text. At first reading, these verses may be confusing, especially if you have some biblical insight and exposure to the metaphors used throughout the scriptures. “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” (vv. 49–50).

A Salty Metaphor

Most Christians would have been exposed to the metaphor of them being salt in this world. As salt is a purifying and anti-decay agent, so Christians need to be agents of purification—standing against and preventing decay in the world in which they live. But here, the need for being salted is applied personally. This purifying effect of salt is pointed to in v. 49, where every sacrifice will need to be pure—salted—to be accepted. One can't help but think of the instruction given to the Romans 12, where Christians are called to present themselves as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. Here, we see Jesus restating to the disciples that they need to consider themselves as sacrifices and, more than that, sacrifices that need to be seasoned by salt. Jesus, who knew what lay ahead of him, who knew that he would be the ultimate sacrifice for sin, who knew that he, as the perfect sacrifice, would need to be perfectly pure, instructs the disciples to accept the responsibility to be a pure sacrifice.

Do you consider your Christian life to be lived as a sacrifice before the Lord? And in your sacrificial living, are you especially determined to be pure and purified and purifying?

The next usage of salt is found in the first half of v. 50 where the effect of salt on the palate is highlighted. Christians should, through their work in the world, make the world more palatable. Not just free from decay, but tasty, well-seasoned and pleasing to God's palate. That is quite a responsibility when you come to appreciate it. The Christian's work is not just to be a restraint to decay, but should be so that the tasteless world becomes a tasty delight.

We learn this principle in Matthew 5:13. God is glorified when Christians are salty and when their lights shine before men, so that their good works may be seen. So, in v. 49, and the first bit of v. 50, we have that understanding. Jesus told his disciples to be a preserving influence in this world. Don't lose your flavour but continue to glorify God by helping people to taste and see that the Lord is good.

A Peaceful Exhortation

But then we have our first one another in the second part of v. 50. “Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.” What is this salt and how does it relate to peace between believers? Of course, we can see the importance of purity in our relationships and the benefit of bringing Christ’s flavour to bear in all our lives, but what does Jesus mean by the command to his disciples to have salt in themselves, personally, and then peace between themselves corporately?

The two statements naturally follow on from one another. When someone has experienced the salting of their own hearts and lives – gospel--they can then be united to others who have also been salted. Inward grace, personally received, has the effect of purifying the individual. Even as the individual is then kept free from the desires of the flesh, which all tend towards selfishness, their attitude and disposition become more externally focused on other people. Only when the pervasive selfishness that resides in all of us is salted out of us do we have the capacity to respond to others with peace and togetherness. Remember, the gospel has a dual effect in the world. When shared, the gospel brings peace between believers; but, when not shared between people, the gospel brings a separation, a sword. But let us focus our attention to the very last phrase in v. 50 – the first of our one anothers: “Have peace with one another.”

As just mentioned, the only way to have true peace between people is if they have themselves individually been salted by the gospel. But now, for those who find themselves as Christians, as those who have salt in themselves and as those who can now be salty, we see a specific instruction, indeed command, to have peace with one another. Those who have had the blood of the sacrifice applied to the door of their heart must now go on to live in peace with the others who have experienced the same. But there is a clear and wonderful biblical understanding that links these two phrases even more gloriously – a glorious link that makes this first one another very precious.

People in the Old Testament and the ancient peoples of that time would immediately understand the association between salt and peace. A number of times in Scripture we have specific reference to salt in the context of ensuring, sealing and promising to keep a covenant.

In Numbers 18:19 the Lord covenantally promises to preserve the heave offerings for the Levites and describes his promise this way: “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.”

In 2 Chronicles 13:5 we are assured that David and his house will reign over Israel because there had been a covenant of salt: “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?”

And consider Leviticus 2:13: “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. “

This salt of the covenant clearly signifies something more than purification or the Christian’s commitment to being salty in a bland world. It takes on the significance of entering into a covenant, of making and keeping peace between the members of that covenant. To have salt in a relationship is to be intentionally committed to peace in that relationship. Such a covenant of salt is a perpetual covenant. It goes on and on without a foreseeable end. Just as Lot’s wife was turned into a pillar of salt as a timeless reminder of God’s perfect justice and divine vengeance, Christians are to recognise that they have entered into a perpetual covenant with those that are in Christ, and this covenant is overseen and ratified by the Lord God Almighty!

So, returning to the context of this chapter, we find disciples haggling about who will be the greatest and an accompanying rebuke and correction by the Lord Jesus. But Jesus didn’t just stop with the command to stop being self-centred; instead, he drove home the point that the selfish disciples must stop thinking about themselves as being all important and realise that they were to be committed to the good of the others.

A Principled Application

So, how do we make pointed application to our intention to have peace with one another?

First, ask, have I been salted? Are you in Christ? Have you appropriated the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus as the necessary deliverance from your sins? Have you realised that, without Christ’s blood applied to your heart, you are eternally separated from God and are under his divine wrath? Have you come to rejoice that, because Jesus was the perfect, fully salted, flawless human, who died on the cross in your place, you have been delivered from God’s wrath? If you haven’t, forget about peace? Without Christ, there is only condemnation and separation.

Second, do you realise that, as a salted Christian, you have everything necessary to be salty. But you can lose your flavour by lack of intention, by separating from the world so that you have no salty influence, by being light on relationship regardless of how heavy you are on truth and doctrine, by being personally ambitious at the expense of others, and allowing pride an unnecessary and troublesome foothold.

Thirdly, you are commanded to have peace with one another. In the world, we are to have peace, as far as it is possible, with all men. In Christ, and as Christians who have covenanted together, we must have peace. I propose that that is exactly the intention behind a church covenant. There is no clearer description of what desiring to be at peace with one another looks like. It is about covenantally committed Christians sticking to what they have committed to. Allow me to present a condensed version of our own covenant, which has been seasoned with a good measure of salt.

Having been salted we will, strive for unity, care for the congregation, join together productively, lead and love our families, rejoice and sympathise together, be salty – personally and in this world – and support this church and its ministries.

Last, realise that the Lord's instructions to his disciples here, and his instructions to the church and Christians today to have peace, is intended for a magnificent and great purpose – and that is so that many others would get salted and be salty too. Have salt, have peace, so that the kingdom may advance and Christ may be exalted and God may be seen as glorious!

AMEN