

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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Have Salt In Yourselves

Mark 9:42 – 50

These verses are located in the context of the disciples' pursuit of greatness (Mark 9:33 – 37). Why is it that the disciples were asking among themselves, as to which of them would be the greatest, when in vv. 30 – 32, Jesus had told them that as the Son of Man, He was going to suffer and be killed and then rise again from the dead after three days? The disciples, we are told, did not understand what Jesus was talking about and they were afraid to ask Him. Were they debating the issue of greatness because of the Mount of Transfiguration experience in vv. 2 – 13 enjoyed only by Peter, James and John? Were they convinced that since Jesus could heal the boy with the unclean spirit in such a powerful way, that they would share in this power of His?

You would have thought that their arrogance would have been tempered by Jesus' rebuke of Simon Peter in Mark 8:33. Jesus was constantly reminding the disciples of His soon impending death, and it is amazing that this did not restrain the disciples' quest for greatness. Our Lord had even pointed out the lack of faith in the disciples in vv. 28 and 29, but this did not slow down their desire for greatness. The only answer I can put forward is that the disciples were like all of us. They were self-centered, and the kingdom sounded glorious, and as they had inside information (as they thought), so it only stood to reason that they should be part of the glory associated with Jesus and His kingdom. Their self-centeredness is magnified because they argued among themselves as to which would be the greatest. This implies that each of them thought that they deserved to be pre-eminent among the others.

Associated with these issues of greatness and grandeur, was the issue of receiving or believing in Christ. Their attitude had to be like that of a little child. In order to be first, they had to put themselves last and had to become a servant of all, which implied that each disciple should put the others before himself and serve them willingly and freely. The disciples were to serve the little children, the lowliest among a society that venerated maturity and adulthood. This was the equivalent of welcoming or receiving Jesus and the Father. Failure to do this would result in rejection by the Lord.

Jesus rebukes the sectarian attitude displayed by John in vv. 38 – 41. It seems as though John did not think anyone else should have the privilege, responsibility or ability to cast out demons in the Lord's name. Jesus rebukes John for thinking that someone who was doing this work in the Lord's name was actually against Christ. No mighty work (vs. 39) would be able to be done if such a person was not working on behalf of the Lord, so why stop him. Whoever is not against the Lord must be for Him (vs. 40). Service in the name of the Lord merits His reward (vs. 39). The disciples needed to learn the lesson of servanthood.

Jesus begins the section in vv. 42 – 50 by referring again to the little children. Verse 42 concludes vv. 35 – 41 and sets the stage for what follows in vv. 43 – 50. To prevent anyone from believing or coming to the Lord is a great sin, and Jesus uses extreme language (placing a millstone around one's neck and be cast into the sea) to denounce such an action. The hearts of the disciples needed to soften and be welcoming and ready to serve.

Jesus moves from dealing about how to be considerate of others spiritual welfare to being concerned for one's own spiritual welfare. Verses 43 through 50 are concerned with discipleship and the cost of it. Jesus

refers to the hands, feet and eyes of a person being used in committing sin. Hands that perform sin, feet that run to commit sin, and eyes that see and commit sin. These three members of the body are each used to commit sin. If the activity of your hands, feet or eyes causes you to sin (that is to be enticed into sinning), then drastic action is to be taken to stop such sinning. In what ever way temptation comes to a person, violent action is necessary to stop that temptation. Jesus states that if our hands cause us to sin, we should cut them off, if our feet cause us to sin, cut them off, and if our eyes cause us to sin, pluck them out. He does not mean that we should literally do this, but He is saying that drastic measures have to be undertaken to prevent sin occurring. If you find it easy to sin through using your hands, feet or eyes, then the action necessary to prevent you sinning again, must be of such a nature that you cannot use your hands, feet or eyes. Opportunity to sin must be prevented. The violent nature of Jesus' words, suggest the great difficulty that we will experience in doing this.

Failure to be decisive about sin and temptation may ultimately lead to the punishment of hell itself (vv. 44, 45, 47). It is better to enter God's kingdom with one hand, one foot and one eye than to have both and land in hell because the sufferings of hell are eternal – "*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched*" (vs. 48). These words are warnings to believers to deal with sin – "*worm*" probably refers to some internal suffering and "*fire*" to external suffering. We are to be very concerned for our spiritual condition before God. Not only must we not prevent anyone else in their coming to Christ, but we must take heed to ourselves. Discipleship is always at a cost. Jesus stated this so clearly in Mark 8: 34 – 38. Denial of self and sin is part of the cost of discipleship and servanthood.

Having given His disciples this warning about dealing with themselves, Jesus then concludes His dealing with the disciples by speaking about salt. Verse 49 has prompted many different views. Is Jesus referring in the context immediately to those in hell who were suffering in verse 48, when he says that everyone will be salted with fire? Since salt preserves, those in hell will be preserved in their suffering – it is an eternal torment. "*Everyone*" may refer to every disciple alive then or in the future who would experience purifying trials and fire is emblematic of this, or "*everyone*" may be a reference to general judgment that everyone will experience, believer (a refining, purifying judgment) and unbeliever alike. Verse 50 states that salt is good, and this refers to its purifying effect. This seems to be a general observation or statement about salt as being useful or good, however, why does Jesus introduce it here? Why make a mere observation about salt as being useful or good, unless there is a lesson attached? The lesson seems to be in the last part of verse 50. If salt loses its purifying ability then of what value is it? The answer is obvious – none. If "*fire*" in verse 49 is connected to the action of salt, how does the fire lose its sting or purifying effect? That could not be the case with fire in hell.

It seems to me that salt is used in comparison with unbeliever and believer. The immediate context has laid down the price of being a disciple – dealing with sin seriously and radically (vv. 43 – 47), therefore the salt relates to who is a real disciple or not. The real disciple is salty – good. The unbeliever is not salty – worthless. The true disciple will maintain allegiance to Jesus at all costs. This equals "*have salt in yourselves*" (vs. 50). Matthew 5:13 states that true disciples are "*the salt of the earth.*" Luke states that if anyone does not renounce all that he has, he cannot be Jesus' disciple, and then immediately Jesus explains this in terms of salt being good as opposed to being worthless (Luke 14:33 – 35). The cure to greatness is true discipleship – serving and giving of self for the good of others, thus serving the Lord Jesus Christ. It also results in peace among brethren. Peace can never be attained as long as someone thinks they're better than someone else. This is why the disciples were arguing over greatness – they thought they were better than each other. Since we are believers we should be salty people – not in the sense of being unkind or critical, but in the biblical sense of seeking to be a true disciple following our Lord. Let exchange seeking status for salt. Be salty!

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