

## *Ye Are the Salt of the Earth* *Matthew 5:13*

In Matthew 5:13 our Lord Jesus Christ declared unto His disciples, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

In **Matthew 5:13** our Lord Jesus Christ revealed another manner in which we believers have been called to minister unto this spiritually needy world. Therein He declared, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.” Herein our Lord did not actually communicate an activity for us to go and perform. Rather, He communicated a characteristic that we are to be. In fact, He did not even present this characteristic in the form of a command, but in the form of a spiritual certainty. We believers *are* “the salt of the earth.” This spiritual fact is not at all in question. Rather, the questions before us concerns what quality of salt we will be. Will we be spiritually effective as “the salt of the earth”? Or, will we be as salt that has lost its savour and spiritual effectiveness, which is “good for nothing” in the purpose of our Lord for the sake of this world.

### I. The Purpose of the Salt

In our time we commonly think of salt as a readily available and reasonably cheap resource. However, this has not always been so. Salt is absolutely necessary for life; and for thousands of years it was a very important and extremely valuable resource, over which even wars have been fought. In the ancient Chinese Empire, salt was at times stamped into coins and used for money due to its great value. During the Roman Empire, Roman soldiers were partially paid in salt, from which practice we get our English word “salary” (since the Greek word for salt is “*salos*,” and since the payment for salt was called a “*salarium*”). The Greeks, and even the Romans, would also often pay for slaves with salt, from which practice came the phrase that an individual is “not worth his salt.” Indeed, throughout the thousands of years of this world’s history, salt has been a very important and extremely valuable resource. Thus when our Lord indicated that His disciples were “the salt of the earth,” everyone at that time would have understood that He was referring unto His disciples as a very important and extremely valuable element of spiritual character in this world.

Yet what does it mean that we believers are “the salt of the earth”? What is our spiritual purpose as “the salt of the earth”? Throughout past history the most important use of salt has been its ability to purify and thereby to preserve food. Before the time of refrigeration, various meats, including beef, pork, fish, and even butter, were salted in order to keep them from spoiling. This process of salting would remove the water from the meat and thus also from the bacteria in the meat, thereby causing the bacteria to wither and die. Depending on its usage, this process could keep meat from spoiling as long as a year’s time. Therefore, when our Lord referred unto His disciples as the “salt of the earth,” He was referring to us as a spiritual force of purity and preservation within human society. This world and its societal structure is filled with moral and sinful corruption. Furthermore, that moral and

sinful corruption is the very poison which moves a society unto its own destruction. Thus our Lord has given us the ministry and responsibility to be a force of moral purification in society, and thereby to help in preserving society from its moral destruction. This is our purpose from the Lord as “the salt of the earth.”

## II. The Purity of the Salt

Yet what would be the effectiveness of the salt to purify and preserve, if the salt itself is not pure? Even so, our Lord presented the warning in the opening portion of **Matthew 5:13**, saying, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?” In like manner, our Lord presented the warning in the opening portion of **Mark 9:50**, “Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness [his effectiveness as salt], wherewith will ye season it?” Indeed, the ability of salt to purify and preserve is a good and beneficial quality. Indeed, the ability of believers as “the salt of the earth” to be a force of moral purity and preservation for human society is a spiritually good and important quality. Yet what is to be done when we lose our effectiveness as “the salt of the earth” to purify and preserve? Sodium Chloride (salt) itself is a stable compound that does not deteriorate in and of itself by nature. However, the more that salt is mixed with other impurities, the more it will lose its ability and effectiveness to purify and preserve. Indeed, the purity of the salt is important for the effectiveness of the salt to purify and preserve. In like manner, we believers lose our effectiveness as “the salt of the earth” to purify society from moral corruption and to preserve society from moral destruction just as much as we are spiritually impure in our own character.

For this very reason our Lord Jesus Christ added the instruction in **Mark 9:50**, “Have salt in yourselves.” Herein our Lord was not referring unto us as the salt within human society. Nor was He instructing us to be effective as the salt within human society. Rather, herein our Lord was instructing us to have the quality of salt within our very own character. We cannot be effective as “the salt of the earth” if we do not retain the quality of salt within our own selves. Indeed, the spiritual purity of our character is important for us to be a spiritual force of moral purification and preservation upon human society. In order for us to be effective as a spiritual force of moral purification and preservation within human society, we ourselves must remain spiritually pure in our own character. Even so, we must present ourselves as a living sacrifice to live unto our Lord as holy and acceptable in His sight. (See Romans 12:1) We must be holy in all manner of behavior, even as the Lord our God and heavenly Father is holy. (See 1 Peter 1:14-15) We must purify ourselves, even as our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is pure. (See 1 John 3:3) We must “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (See 2 Corinthians 7:1) We must purge ourselves from the false ideas and selfish ways of this world, in order that we might be meet for our Master’s use “and prepared unto every good work.” (See 2 Timothy 2:21) Yea, then we will be prepared unto the good work of being salt for the moral purification and preservation of society. Indeed, we must “flee also youthful lusts, but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (See 2 Timothy 2:22) We must be characterized by clean hands and a pure heart. Only then can we be effective as the pure salt that human society needs, as a spiritual force of moral purification against its corruption and as a spiritual force of moral preservation against its moral destruction.

### III. The Purification of the Salt

Yet salt is not naturally found in a purified form. Rather, it requires a process of purification and refinement to be administered upon it. Even so, in **Mark 9:49** our Lord Jesus Christ spoke concerning this process in relation to us as “the salt of the earth,” saying, “For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.” Herein our Lord presented two parallel statements. Both of these statements contain the same action verb, “shall be salted,” and to “be salted” indicates the process of purification through salting. Thus we understand that both of these statements concern the process of spiritual purifying. Furthermore, in the first statement the subject is “every one;” whereas in the second statement the subject is “every sacrifice.” Thus we understand that in this verse our Lord was speaking about us believers as living sacrifices, who are to live holy and acceptable unto God. This reveals that we ourselves as believers are the ones who need to experience the process of purifying about which our Lord spoke in this verse. We are “the salt of the earth,” as a force of moral purification for human society. As such, we ourselves must be pure in our quality as “the salt of the earth,” in order that we may be effective for the moral purification of society. Therefore, we ourselves need to be purified and refined in our character, in order that we may be pure in quality as “the salt of the earth.”

Finally, our Lord’s two parallel statements in **Mark 9:49** reveal the manner by which we are to be salted, that is – the manner by which we believers are to be spiritually purified. In the first statement this manner is seen in the prepositional phrase “with fire,” whereas in the second statement this manner is seen in the prepositional phrase “with salt.” Certainly, it is natural to expect that the process of salting will be done “with salt,” as is presented in the second statement. However, the statement that we must be salted “with fire” is surprising, since it does not follow a natural process. Yet when we recognize that being “salted” refers to the process of spiritual purifying, then the idea of purifying “with fire” becomes more understandable. Indeed, God’s Word regularly makes reference unto spiritual purifying and refining through the fiery trials of life. Indeed, this is our Lord’s process for our spiritual purifying and refining as “the salt of the earth.” Even so, in **Psalms 66:10** the psalmist proclaimed, “For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.” Even so also, in **1 Peter 1:7** God’s Word declares, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” In like manner, in **James 1:2-4** God’s Word declares, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”

### IV. The Peaceableness of the Salt

Indeed, as “the salt of the earth,” we believers are only effective for the moral purification and preservation of society as much as we are spiritually pure. Thus our Lord presented the instruction in closing portion of **Mark 9:50**, “Have salt in yourselves.” Yet our Lord also presented a second instruction in the closing portion of **Mark 9:50** – “And have peace one with another.” Herein our Lord departed from the illustration of salt and presented a second characteristic that must characterize our lives if we are to be effective as “the salt of the

earth.” First, we must be characterized by purity. Then flowing from that purity, we must be characterized by peaceableness. Even so, **James 3:17-18** declares, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” The wisdom of this world in its essential nature is self-centered, following the course of the devil. (See **James 3:15**) This selfish wisdom is characterized by “bitter envying and strife,” which in turn brings forth “confusion and every evil work.” (See **James 3:14 & 16**) As such, this selfish wisdom is the very seed of moral corruption and moral destruction within society.

Therefore, as “the salt of the earth,” we believers must be characterized, not by this selfish wisdom of the world, but by godly wisdom, by “the wisdom that is from above.” If we are to be a force of moral purification and preservation within society, we must be characterized by a wisdom that is “first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated.” We need to be characterized by a wisdom that is “full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.” Indeed, this pure and peaceable wisdom is the very seed by which we can sow the fruit of righteousness within society. As we “seek peace, and pursue it” (see Psalm 33:14) and thereby serve as peacemakers, we will be sowing “the fruit of righteousness” in peace. Even so, **Romans 12:18** gives the instruction, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Yea, such purity and peaceableness must especially characterize our relationship with one another as fellow believers, if we are to impact society around us as “the salt of the earth.” Even so, in **John 17:20-23** our Lord Jesus Christ prayed, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” Indeed, our spiritual influence upon this world has much to do with our purity and peaceableness toward one another. “Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” (**Romans 14:19**) Let us endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (See **Ephesians 4:3**) “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering,” let us forbear “one another in love.” (See **Ephesians 4:2**) Let us allow the peace of God to rule in our hearts one toward another. (See **Colossians 3:15**) “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (**Matthew 5:9**)

## V. The Prudence of the Salt

So then, we believers must be characterized by purity and peaceableness in order to be effective as “the salt of the earth” for the moral purification and preservation of society. Yet there is a third characteristic that must characterize our lives if we are to be effective as “the salt of the earth.” Flowing out of the characteristics of purity and peaceableness, we must also be characterized by godly prudence, especially in the manner of our speech. In **Colossians 4:5-6** the instruction is given, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.” Now, walking in godly wisdom toward the spiritually lost world around us, “toward them that are without” as “the salt of the earth,

requires that we “walk as children of light: . . . proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” (See **Ephesians 5:8 & 10**) Furthermore, it requires that we walk under the guiding influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit; “for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” (See **Ephesians 5:9 & 18**) Finally, it requires that we “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” (See **Ephesians 5:11**) Indeed, this is the manner by which we may “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (See **Ephesians 5:15-16**)

Yet in all of this we must especially have our speech to be governed by the indwelling Holy Spirit in order that our speech may be “always with grace, seasoned with salt.” Indeed, our speech must always be seasoned with the salt of godly purity and must always be filled with the grace of godly peaceableness. Then we shall have the godly prudence to “know how” we “ought to answer every man.” As God’s people in this world, we have a responsibility to reprove “the unfruitful works of darkness” and to beseech the lost with the word of the gospel. Therefore, we must “sanctify the Lord God” in our hearts, and must “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh [us] a reason of the hope that is in [us] with meekness and fear.” (See **1 Peter 3:15**) On the other hand, we must “do all things without murmurings and disputings: that [we] may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom [we] shine as lights in the world.” (See **Philippians 2:14-15**) We must not render “evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise a blessing.” (See **1 Peter 3:9**) We must keep our “tongue from evil,” and must keep our lips from speaking any guile. (See **1 Peter 3:10**) We must remember that eternal life and eternal death for a lost world are in the power of our tongue. (See **Proverbs 18:21**) Even so, let us have our speech “always with grace, seasoned with salt,” in order that our mouth may be “a well of life.” (See **Proverbs 10:11**)

## VI. The Punishment of the Salt

We believers must be characterized by godly purity in conduct, and godly peaceableness in relationship, and godly prudence in speech in order to be effective as “the salt of the earth” for the moral purification and preservation of society. Yet what if we are not characterized by godly purity, peaceableness, and prudence? What if we are as salt that has lost its quality and effectiveness to purify and preserve? In **Luke 14:34-35** our Lord Jesus Christ spoke specifically concerning this matter, saying, “Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Again in Matthew 5:13 our Lord Jesus Christ spoke specifically concerning this matter, saying, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

In the first place, we learn that salt which has lost its quality and effectiveness to purify and preserve is “good for nothing.” Salt that has “lost his savour” cannot be reseasoned. Salt that is contaminated and spoiled is just that – spoiled. Such salt is “neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill.” It is not fit for fertile land because it would destroy that fertility. It is not fit for the hill of dung that would be used for fertilizer because it would counteract the fertilizing process. In fact, through His statement concerning the dunghill, our Lord indicated that the hill of dung is of more value than salt that has “lost his savour.” Even so,

if we “as the salt of the earth” are not characterized by godly purity, peaceableness, and prudence, then we are spiritually “spoiled” as a force of moral purification and preservation within society. Indeed, then we are spiritually “good for nothing” in our Lord’s purpose for us in relation to the lost world around us. If we as “spoiled salt,” without godly purity, peaceableness, and prudence, were to get around an unbeliever whose heart is fertile ground for the gospel, our ungodly character would destroy that spiritual fertility, and thereby hinder that unbeliever from receiving “the glorious gospel of Christ.”

In the second place, we learn that salt which has lost its quality and effectiveness to purify and preserve is worthy only “to be trodden under foot of men.” The only thing to do with salt that has “lost his savour” is to cast it out and get rid of it. Yet since it would be destructive unto any fertile ground, the only place for it to be cast in Jesus’ day was upon the dirt pathways and roadways. Then on those pathways and roadways, where people would travel day by day, the “spoiled” salt would “be trodden under foot of men” until it was ground into the dust of the earth. Even so, if we “as the salt of the earth” are not characterized by godly purity, peaceableness, and prudence, then we are “good for nothing” in our Lord’s work; and then our Lord will cast us out into this world “to be trodden under foot of men.” Just as He used the Assyrians with Israel and the Babylonians with Judah, our Lord will use the people of this world, and the circumstances of this world, and even the “god” of this world, the devil, to chasten us and grind away our spiritually useless lives.

So then, let us not be as salt that has “lost his savour.” Rather, let us be characterized by godly purity in conduct, godly peaceableness in relationship, and godly prudence in speech in order that we may be effective as “the salt of the earth” for the moral purification and preservation of society. Yet if we are already as salt that has “lost his savour,” we can depend upon our Lord’s grace and power. His grace is marvelous, and His power is almighty. As such, He is able to do what man is unable to do. In His almighty grace He is able to make “spoiled” salt to be full of savour again. Thus, when we as salt that has “lost his savour,” he calls us to “be zealous therefore, and repent.” (See Revelation 3:19)