



Christ Reformed Community Church

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“Excellence in Christian Living” Mark 9:43–50

Well, this morning, it’s my privilege to look with you together at Mark chapter 9. So, I encourage you to take your Bibles if you have them with you, Mark chapter 9, and this morning’s message is simply entitled: “Excellence in Christian Living.” Mark chapter 9. When you find your place there, stand in honor of the readings of God’s Word. I’ll begin reading in verse 43 and I’ll read down through verse 50, some very sobering words from the lips of our Lord Jesus. Jesus says, beginning in verse 43:

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.” For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

This is God’s eternal Word, and may He etch its eternal truths on your hearts. Please be seated as we ask Him for help this morning.

Lord, we read a very sobering passage of Scripture, and Lord, we know that it will require the power of Your Holy Spirit to accept these words, to understand these words so that we might be more sanctified vessels, that we might be vessels fit for heaven, not for hell. So, Lord, help us this morning to think clearly, to be empowered by Your Spirit, that You may bless Your people with Your truth. We pray all of these things in the blessed and holy name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, we pray. Amen.

If you’ve been with us as we study the Gospel of Mark, we come now to that point in the life and ministry of our Lord where He is already on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified, and along the way, He teaches many lessons to the apostles. Many of these are very difficult lessons for them to understand; lessons regarding humility, lessons regarding pride, but I will tell you this morning that nothing really even comes close to the lesson that our Lord provides for the disciples here in verses 43 through 50. Of course, the whole discourse began there in verse 42 where Jesus made the statement: “*Whoever causes one of these little ones,*” that is, one of His children, “*who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.*” We thought that was bad last week, that Jesus says, “It’s better that a millstone were hung around your neck and that you were thrown into the sea to be drowned than

to cause one of God’s people to sin,” either by a bad example or tempting them to sin, or in some other indirect way that we spoke about.

That seems serious enough, but in verses 43 through 50, it shifts. Verse 42, the warning was about causing others to sin and the consequences that would come from that, but in verses 43 through 50 we have a warning about making sure we don’t cause ourselves to sin and the consequences that come from that. They are serious consequences; in fact, so serious that Jesus says it’s better to cut off your hand or to cut off your foot or to gouge out your eye if it causes you to sin. It’s better to cut off body parts and enter heaven crippled and lame and blind than to enter hell with two hands, two feet, two eyes, have a body full of sin, and have God’s divine wrath upon you for all of eternity. I mean, everything about this passage is shocking. It’s violent. It’s fear filled. He talks about hacking off body parts to avoid hell. Sobering, convicting, possibly even condemning, depending on who we are this morning, and perhaps most shocking of all is that they come from the lips of the Lord Jesus Himself. The Bible says in principle, Matthew 26, *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:12, *“Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”* The summary of the Christian life is one of humility not pride. The summary of the Christian life is that *“Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* That includes cutting off parts of your body if that’s what it takes to avoid hell. Such is very serious.

We read earlier from 1 Samuel 15:33 that Samuel the prophet hacked Agag into pieces at Gilgal, chopped him up; a vivid illustration of God’s hatred of sin and love for His own glory. God could not stand to see evil in the camp of the Israelites. God could not see Saul act wickedly by not killing Agag, the evil king of the Amalekites. So, Saul was rebuked by Samuel, a prophecy from God that he would no longer be on the throne and that he would be replaced. God used Samuel to kill and literally hack up another man’s body to remove the evil in the midst of the body of God’s people so that there wasn’t the risk of God’s people being not ruled by God. It is a vivid illustration to us of the seriousness of which God views sin and the seriousness of which we are to view the sin in our own lives. We are to be like Samuel. We are to be willing to hack off out of our lives whatever it is that might cause us to stumble, that might cause us to sin. Just as God took drastic measures and used Samuel to cut Agag into pieces, Jesus calls upon his disciples to aggressively cut the sin out of their lives. It’s a call to live holy. It’s a call to live sanctified. And at the end of it, it’s to do so—listen to this—in order to preserve the corruption of the world that we live in, to show very vividly before the world the rule of Christ and to show that the rule of Christ should have no rivals. So, this is very personal, isn’t it? Jesus speaks to individual disciples and disciples as individuals, telling them in essence that they need to pursue excellence in their Christian living.

How do we pursue excellence in our Christian living? First Corinthians 10:31: *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* How do you pursue excellence in your Christian living? We find here in verses 43 through 50 three non-negotiables to excellence in Christian living. These are all-encompassing; they are comprehensive; they are all-inclusive. This is not multiple choice. This is all of the above. These are non-negotiables for your Christian life if you want to live in an excellent way to the glory of God. First of all, Jesus says that we must establish spiritual mutilation no matter the pain. Secondly, we need to embrace sacrificial dedication no matter the trial; and third, we need to engage in societal preservation no matter the culture. It is comprehensive. It is detailed. It is a call to arms. It is serious, and it is obligatory.

There is no Christian to which this does not apply. It applies to us all; three non-negotiables to excellence in Christian living. Let’s begin, number one. The first non-negotiable is this: Jesus tells us that we need to establish spiritual mutilation no matter the pain, as crazy as that sounds. Verses 43 through 48, really the largest hunk or chunk of this passage of Scripture. Notice again verse 43:

“And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ‘where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’”

I mean, in essence what Jesus is saying here is that we need to establish a pattern of spiritual mutilation no matter the pain. Why? Well, because sin is not a friend; sin is a foe. Either we kill sin or sin will kill us. Sin must be eradicated, not placated. This is not a matter of negotiation. This is a matter of eradication and total obliteration. Either we conquer sin, or it defeats us. This is a matter of life or death. This is a matter of heaven or hell. This is a matter of sin or holiness. We must, by the power of the Holy Spirit—this is what verses 43 through 48 are telling us—put out the fire of sin or we reveal—listen to this—we are actually in danger of the fire of hell. This is not a game. It is a battle, and we don’t just lose a contest, we lose life itself. That is the word that is described. We forfeit life itself when we don’t cut sin out of our life. Now, obviously the language is symbolic. It’s metaphorical. It’s not talking about physical mutilation, but what we might call spiritual mortification or spiritual mutilation.

There have been some throughout church history, like Origen of Alexandria, church father who took these verses literally and he practiced mutilation by emasculation to suppress, as he said, the sordid desires of his heart. Let me just put you at ease; he was wrong. And shortly after, the Council of Nicea outlawed such a practice, but there was another man in church history who did equally ridiculous things. His name was St. Benedict. By his own account, he says that one day while alone, the tempter came in the form of a little black bird fluttering about his face, and Benedict said that he made the sign of the cross so that the bird flew away; but soon the evil spirit began recalling to his mind a woman that he once saw, and suddenly, intense temptation filled his heart. But then suddenly the grace of God arrived, and the grace of God arrived in something you might not guess because he saw the grace of God in the thick patch of briars over to the side. So, he threw off his garment. He flung himself naked into the thorn bushes. He rolled around and tossed himself about until his entire body was in pain and he was covered in blood, but he says, “I had conquered that temptation and my bleeding skin drained off the poison of temptation because the pain that was burning in my body had put out the fires of hell in my evil heart. I gained victory over sin.” And he says so great was his victory that he told his disciples he never experienced another temptation like that again. And as a result, men from everywhere followed him because under his guidance, he was ready to instruct others regarding the practice of virtue. Such is absolutely ridiculous, and clearly not what Jesus has in mind.

What did Jesus say back in Mark chapter 7? Jesus said, *“What comes out of a person is what defiles him,”* verse 20, *“For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”* Sin is inward, right?

James tells us that: *“But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.”* Or Proverbs 4:23: *“Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”*

So, it’s clear that what Jesus is speaking about here is simply this; the hand of verse 43 symbolizes what we do. Notice it again: *“And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.”* The foot of verse 45 symbolizes where we go. *“And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.”* And the eye of verse 47 symbolizes where we look. *“And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out.”* But you can still have no hands, no feet, and no eyes and still have inward sin. That’s the point of James chapter 1. You are enticed by what is within, not what is without. So, this is not a matter of bleeding bodies that drain away the poison of temptation; this is a matter of bleeding souls where the Spirit does battle with fleshly desires. The issue this morning if you are struggling with sin is an issue of self-denial. It is an issue of discipline in your life where you are going to make one of two decisions. Either you’re going embrace that sin, or you’re going to sever it from your life, sever things from your life—things your Christian hands should not do, places your Christian feet should not go, views your Christian eyes should never take. Jesus mentions our hands, feet and eyes because sin in the heart is always inward, but it expresses itself outwardly in actions. That’s the point.

Leviticus 19:28 is clear that we are not to disfigure our bodies, but Christians are called to discipline their souls so that their lives are free from sin. This seemed to be exactly what Paul’s point was in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. Paul said in verse 24, *“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air.”* This is not shadow boxing. *“But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”* Paul says that at the end of the day this is a matter of a spiritual race. This is a matter of something that takes place in the soul, but yet there are things that I do with my body, with my hands, with my eyes, with my feet. There are things I prevent my body from doing that my heart is trying to lead my body to do, and so I discipline myself. I discipline my life. Scripture calls God’s people, by the Spirit’s power, to do exactly what Paul says; to slay the remaining vestiges of sin from their lives.

Here’s a good summary of verses 43 through 48. Romans 8:13: *“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.”* The secret to living godly is not emasculating your physical organs, flinging your body into thorn bushes. It’s by cutting out temptation, preventing your body from going where your heart is leading, cutting out the temptation itself. This is illustrated in the Bible a number of times. Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:22: *“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness,”* and that was illustrated very well in the Old Testament by Joseph who fled the seduction of Potiphar’s wife. He literally ran away. So, the question this morning, very practically, is this: Are there activities that you engage in that tempt your hands to do things they shouldn’t do, and if others knew about you would be ashamed? Are there places your feet go that they have no business going, because if you go there, they open a door of temptation to sin? Are there areas and views that your eyes take that could cause sinful imaginations and lusts of the heart to be fed? If there is, don’t go there. Romans 13:14: *“But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”*

This is a matter of discipline. Second Corinthians 7:1: *“Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”* We are to bring holiness to completion in the fear of God. Is there no fear of God in your heart? Is there no fear of hell? Is there no fear of the wrath of God Almighty? Jesus is warning His own disciples that they must take the most drastic measures necessary to avoid sin, to avoid temptation, and—listen to this—to avoid hell itself, to avoid hell itself, to cut out habits, places. Sever them from our lives to gouge out unlawful lusts, to be decisive, to be radical, to be complete, to be systematic, to be thorough. Job did it this way. He said in Job 31:1, *“I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look upon a young woman?”* Job said it’s very simple. *“I’m going to discipline my eyes not to look where they shouldn’t look.”* That’s how you discipline your body.

Note with me that there may be different temptations for different people. Notice again verse 43. Jesus says, *“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.”* Verse 45: *“If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off.”* Verse 47: *“If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out.”* It is a matter of your hand, your feet, your eyes. It’s a matter of discipline. It’s a matter of spiritual amputation that you must participate in. This isn’t something that your spouse can do for you. It’s not something your pastor can do for you. It’s not something your parents can do for you, or your friends can do for you. You must do it. You must say no to sin and yes to sanctification. No to Satan; yes to God. No to laziness and apathy, and yes to discipline and holiness. Here is the point; it’s better to fight the hell of sin on this earth than to fight hell for eternity, a battle that is unwinnable because, again, notice the end of verse 43, for example. *“It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell.”* Or verse 45, the end of it. *“It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.”* Or the end of verse 47: *“It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.”* I mean, you see the point. Heaven, or the kingdom of God is being contrasted with hell. You either go north or you go south. You either go to heaven or you go to hell. You either go to be with Jesus, or you go to be with Satan. There’s no neutral ground. There’s no neutral ground. The consequence of not cutting out sin places us in danger of the fires of hell. Jesus is so clear.

Now, it is true, there is a sort of hell, living hell, that we can experience in this life. Isaiah says this: *“For wickedness burns like a fire; it consumes briars and thorns; it kindles the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column of smoke. Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts the land is scorched, and the people are like fuel for the fire; no one spares another.”* There is a sort of sin that when it spreads it not only brings the wrath of God, but it brings this sort of hellish living among people where it’s just a living hell. Sin will do that. Sin will wreak havoc in your life, in your relationships. And so, there’s incentive enough there to cut sin out of our lives, to cut temptation out of our lives, to discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness, to flee youthful lusts, to pursue righteousness, to cleanse ourself from sin and defilement. But that’s not the sort of hell that Jesus is speaking about here.

The type of hell Jesus is describing is eternal. Notice with me again verse 43, the end of it. He calls it an *“unquenchable fire.”* Or verse 48, *“Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”* Now the Greek word that He uses here for hell, *geenna*, is a reference to the eternal place of God’s wrath, also known as the lake of fire. That’s how Revelation describes it. You’re familiar with hades. That is more generally the place of the dead. Most of the time when the

Scriptures speak about hades, it’s just talking about the place of the dead. It’s not necessarily talking about those who are in eternal hell. But when *geenna* is used, it always describes eternal torment of sinners, the lake of fire. Now people ask me all the time, and usually it’s unbelievers, but sometimes even Christians, “Do you believe in a literal hell with fire?” My standard answer is usually this: “No, as a matter of fact I don’t.” I believe that not only is hell a literal fire, but it is far worse than merely a literal fire. It is far worse. Fire is merely the words that the Scripture uses—fire and sulfur and lake—to describe how horrible it is. I believe there is a literal fire there, but I do not think that is the height of the pain inflicted.

In fact, when you do a study of the word *geenna* or hell, it’s taken from Joshua chapter 15. It literally means “the Valley of the Sons” because there was a valley south of Jerusalem in the days of wicked kings Ahaz and Manasseh where apostate Israelites were burning their children as sacrifices to the false god Molech, the king of the Ammonites. Godly King Josiah was so disgusted at this that he cursed the valley. But during the intertestamental period; that is, the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament, this valley, the Valley of the Sons as it became known, south of Jerusalem became the garbage dump of the City of Jerusalem. It was a symbol of punishment where both worms and fire consumed the refuse. It’s where other bodies were burned, bodies of criminals were burned. The language of verse 48, “*Where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched,*” is taken from Isaiah 66:24. It’s borrowed here by Jesus to indicate God’s eternal wrath. I mean, again, the life of verse 43, it’s better to enter life; and the kingdom of God of verse 47 is being contrasted with the hell of verse 43, the hell of verse 45, the hell of verse 47, described, as I said in Revelation, as the lake of fire.

When was the last time that you heard a preacher speak this long about hell? It’s probably been a while. Some believers try to avoid hell by ascribing to the doctrine known as annihilation, or annihilationism. That is the idea that hell describes the destruction of the wicked as ending them, but the Bible describes the destruction of the wicked not as ending them, but as being everlasting upon them, 2 Thessalonians 1:9, the “*punishment of eternal destruction*” eternal destruction, “*away from the presence of the Lord.*” Jude 6 and 7 describe hell as the “*punishment of eternal fire*” where there are “*eternal chains,*” and there is forever “*gloomy darkness.*” As a matter of fact, the Lord Jesus Christ speaks more about hell than anyone else in all the Bible, and He speaks more about hell than He does heaven. Revelation 14 says, “*And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever,*” so that “*they have no rest day or night.*” Conscious. And yet it’s still hard for me, first of all, to imagine that there is a hell; and secondly, to imagine that there are those there now, even people that I’ve known in this life, who are suffering. But it is equally hard for me to imagine the possibility that hell doesn’t exist; otherwise, how could God’s justice be meted out? If wicked sinners can do whatever they want to do, rebel against God, and then get a free pass in the end and just be destroyed and be unconscious, what does that say about the justice of God? What does that say about the holiness of God? What does that say about the expense of the blood of Christ that was shed for sinners?

So, I affirm that hell exists, and I seek to avoid it, not by dismissing it but by clinging desperately to the grace of forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ. Because here’s the reality; if I am a true Christian, I must live a life that is yielded to the Holy Spirit, actively cutting sin out of my life, cutting temptations out of my life to prove that I am not qualified for hell and disqualified for heaven. Otherwise, this passage in Mark proves to apply to me—a false Christian. I’ll enter eternity

and the smoking rubbish heap of God’s wrath where the fuel of God’s judgment, the fire of His judgment is constantly stoked and the eternal worms gorge themselves on the refuse of my filthy, rotten, sinful life, which led me to that dreadful place.

Well, what do I do? I seek to cut the sin out of my life by cutting the temptation out of my life. I do as Paul tells me to do in Philippians 2. I “*work out my salvation with fear and trembling*” because I know it is God who is at work in me. I know that if I’m a true Christian, the Holy Spirit resides within me, and I must live by the Spirit, or I will die. I will prove that I’m on the path to hell. I must and you must this morning look to Christ and look away from sin. Christ is our only hope, and someone who truly knows Christ is scared to death of hell, scared to death of hell because a true Christian knows they don’t deserve heaven. Their fear of hell is what leads them to want heaven. Their fear of God’s judgment is what leads them to cling to the cross and to look for mercy and grace only in the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is that same fear that says, “Look, if I’m a true Christian and I’m indwelt by the Spirit of God, God has me. God is holding me. God will keep me from the flame of sin, and God will keep me from the flame of hell. Therefore, I must avoid the flames of sin, the fires that burn within me.” This is spiritual mortification, not physical mutilation, but it’s like physical mutilation because a true Christian is willing to cut anything out of his or her life that could one day indicate that he or she is on the path to hell.

What is it worth to you? What sin is so valuable to your heart and your life that you’re willing to risk the fact that you’re on the way to hell? Here’s Jesus’ point; true Christians will establish a pattern of spiritual mutilation no matter the pain, and they’ll do it out of gratitude for the pain caused to Christ on the cross which He endured in order to forgive us of our sins. This is not works salvation; it’s desperately clinging to Christ and running from sin because you know that as a true Christian, Christ has saved you from living that way. So, you pursue that path of righteousness that He placed you on. That is what Jesus is saying in this passage. You want your life to be marked by excellence in Christian living? Here’s the first non-negotiable. You must establish spiritual mutilation no matter the pain. Now, that’s the foundation. That is the heart of what Jesus is getting at, and if you’re not willing to do that, then there’s no hope. But there’s a second non-negotiable. If we want to live excellently to the glory of God, we must not only establish spiritual mutilation no matter the pain, but secondly, we must embrace sacrificial dedication no matter the trial. Jesus moves from the fires of hell to the fires of suffering.

Notice with me in verse 49, explanatory word *for*. “*For everyone will be salted with fire. For everyone will be salted with fire.*” Now, that has perplexed many people, and on the surface, I admit that seems like a very confusing statement. What is Jesus speaking about? Well, there is a logical connection with verses 43 through 48 and verse 49 when we understand the Old Testament imagery that Jesus is using. The book of Leviticus chapter 2 and verse 13, other places in the Old Testament like Ezekiel chapter 43 indicate the fact that when sacrifices were offered in the Old Testament, obviously they were burned up with fire, but there was always salt that seasoned those sacrifices. They were seasoned with salt and fire. In fact, in Ezekiel 43:23–24, salt and fire are mentioned together. What is salt? Well, salt in any part of the world, and in any time of history serves as a preservative. So, the salt in a sacrifice has great symbolic value. It is saying that the sacrifice being burnt up is being preserved symbolically by that salt as a testimony to the faithfulness of God to the covenant. In fact, Leviticus 2:13 refers to the salt of the sacrifice as “*the salt of the covenant.*” What is the salt of the covenant? Well, what is the covenant? The covenant

has to do with God’s promises to save His people, right? At the heart of the covenant, it has to do with God’s promises to save His people. What is a sacrifice? It’s saying that blood must be shed, looking forward to Christ so that the promise of God’s salvation can be fulfilled. What does the salt represent in the fire of that sacrifice? That God will preserve His covenant, that God will remain faithful to His covenant.

Now, of course, the Bible teaches that we also are to be living sacrifices: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.”* We are called to be living sacrifices. We should commit ourselves to God as sacrifices to holiness, but the reason we do that is because God has committed Himself to us covenantally, and that is really the point of verse 49. Notice again the language is not first and foremost what Christians do but what God does. Notice it again, verse 49, it’s a statement. *“For everyone will be salted with fire.”* This isn’t so much asking the Christian to do something; this is God telling the Christian what is going to happen to them. You will be *“salted with fire.”* It reminds us of many of the promises in God’s Word, that we will be living sacrifices. Second Timothy 3:12: *“Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will,”* what? *“Suffer persecution.”* In Acts 14:22, it is through many trials, the apostles tell us, that we will *“enter the kingdom of God.”*

If you turn with me for a moment over to 1 Peter chapter 4, Peter uses really interesting language here for our discussion when he says in verse 12 of 1 Peter 4: *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the,”* what? *“fiery trial.”* Peter uses persecution and suffering in general as illustrative in fire, a *“fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you.”* And then Peter says, *“as though something strange were happening to you.”* Why would you think it strange when Jesus says in Mark 9:49 that *“Everyone will be salted with fire”*? Everyone will be a sacrificial dedication to God. Everyone will experience some level of suffering, some sort of trial, some sort of burden. Peter says, *“When that fiery trial comes, don’t think it a strange thing.”* Jesus predicted it. The apostles predicted it. Notice verse 13: *“But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”* Very interesting language. The fact that you are salted with fire, the fact that you are a sacrifice—listen to this—is a reminder to you of the promises of God, number one, that you’re going to experience trials and suffering; and number two, that you can be joyful and feel blessed in the midst of that because that is a sign that God is remaining faithful to His covenant, that God is remaining faithful to His covenant promises to save you, as it were, through the fire.

That is why in 1 Peter chapter 1, the way Peter opens it up in verse 6, he says, *“In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.”* Why? Verse 7: *“So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested,”* by what? *“By fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* The question is not will you suffer? The question is how will you suffer? The question is not, as a Christian, will I choose to be a living sacrifice or not? No, you will be if you’re a true Christian. That’s why I word it in this sense: we are to embrace our sacrificial dedication no matter the trial. We are to embrace it. We are to accept it. We are to cling to it because we know that we are being salted with fire. God is making us a living sacrifice and

so we yield ourselves to Him. We offer ourselves even more so as a living sacrifice to God as part of our spiritual worship. Along with the salt of God’s covenantal promises to save us comes the fire of persecution, but the fire of suffering is better than the fire of sulfur in hell. Jesus is clearly telling us, “Which do you want? Do you want the fire and the sulfur of hell, or do you want the fire of suffering?” True Christians will always suffer. True Christians will always embrace that suffering as a sacrificial dedication to God; and here’s the reality, suffering helps us see what is important in life. Suffering prunes us. Suffering matures us. Suffering helps us to be more serious, more soberminded, and what does that do? That helps us to pursue a more godly life.

Suffering is a gift from God to you and to me. Though it hurts, it’s a reminder of the salt of His faithfulness, His covenant promises, that the very reason we’re going through that suffering is a sign that we are willing to cut out of our lives whatever it is we need to cut out. And what does God do? He pours on a little more suffering, but there’s a pinch of the salt of His covenant faithfulness in which we can rejoice and be glad, and we no longer want those things we used to want because we’ve been humbled under the mighty hand of God, 1 Peter 5:5. We are more sober, more serious-minded. We pursue the things of God with more steadfastness and more discipline and more drive to be like Christ. That’s why James says, *“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”* Lacking in absolutely nothing. So, when we suffer without losing our faith, it’s a clear sign to us of God’s salt, His preserving grace to keep His end of the covenant and to help us keep our end of the covenant. That’s the blessedness of trials. You come out the other side of trials and you realize your faith is still intact, and you realize there’s no way I could have gotten through that were it not for the salt of God’s covenantal faithfulness. He put me through that, so I’ll embrace the next trial. I’ll embrace the next suffering. I won’t be bitter, but I will rejoice in that suffering. And that’s what Christ is calling us to embrace. He’s calling us to embrace suffering, not because in and of itself it is always a joyful thing, but because the result of it purifies our lives, cleanses us.

And it’s not all futile because notice how the passage ends. Verse 50, Jesus says, *“Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”* If we want to live in an excellent way, a God-glorifying way, there are several non-negotiables. Number one, we will establish spiritual mutilation no matter the pain. We will cut sin, cut temptation out of our life. Number two, we will embrace sacrificial dedication no matter the trial, but number three, that means we will engage in societal preservation no matter the culture. That’s what Jesus is speaking about in verse 50. Again, the connection between verse 49 and 50 is really one word, and is the word *salt*, the idea of salt. Jesus says, the central command of verse 50, the end of it, *“Have salt in yourselves.”* Here’s the point; Christians are to be the preservative of culture. The Jews had a slogan. They said this: “The world cannot live and cannot survive without salt.” Why was that? Well, because salt was used in the ancient world to preserve food from rotting. But Jesus’ point here is how much more catastrophic to have a culture, to have a society, without a Christian influence. I mean, Jesus wraps up the whole discussion about rooting out the sin of your life and pursuing holiness not ultimately for your sake alone but for the sake of the culture, for the sake of the culture. He says, notice the beginning of verse 50, *“Salt is good.”* Good for what? Good as a preservative. *“But if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again?”*

The West, which has been influenced by the Protestant Reformation more than any place in the world, is on the brink of altogether losing its saltiness. Look at the church today. Chaos in beliefs. Look at the church today. Compromise in living. This causes Christians to lose their influence. Never has Christ’s command in verse 50 applied more to you and I than today. *“Have salt in yourselves.”* But the building up of the kingdom of God, the rebuilding of the West, doesn’t happen overnight. It’s one block at a time. So what Jesus is saying here is that, sure, we need to have the macro view. What is the macro view of the growth of God’s kingdom, the building of God’s kingdom? Well, it means that it’s good for Christians to be involved in civic life, to oppose ungodly legislation. It’s good for Christians to seek to preserve the integrity of Christian institutions and civic institutions built on Judeo-Christian values. That’s the macro. But Jesus is not really talking about the macro; He’s talking about the micro.

Notice again what He says in verse 50. He says, *“Have salt in,”* what? *“yourselves.”* This is very personal. This is very individualistic. Just like He talked about your hand and your foot and your eyes, here He says, *“Have salt in yourselves.”* Cut the sin out of your life. Cut the temptation out of your life. Embrace your suffering to have an impact, to have an impact. Jesus says we are to be *“the salt of the world,”* Matthew 5:13. That’s the macro. We are to be the *“the salt of the world.”* Collectively, Christians are to be *“the salt of the world,”* but we are only *“the salt of the world”* when we are first salt in our own little worlds, when we are a preservative to the unbelievers around us; and when we’re not, our Christian faith has no influence on the sin-cursed world. This is a call to be countercultural. This is a call to promote the rule and the reign of Christ in your own heart, in your own family, in your own church before any sort of rebuilding of any sort of Christianity in the culture can take place. Today, Christianity is marked by fake salt, not functional. It’s like in ancient times they would cull salt from the Dead Sea, and sometimes it would be mixed with impurities like gypsum, and they couldn’t use it. It looked like salt, but it wasn’t salt. It was fake salt, but it didn’t function rightly. It only looked like salt. It didn’t produce lifesaving function of salt, life-preserving function of salt.

Now, listen, we don’t draw the world to Christ by looking like the world. We draw the world to Christ by looking like Christ. And yet professing Christians today mitigate the life-giving properties of the gospel by not preaching the truth, by not preaching sin, by not preaching the law of God. I tweeted out earlier this morning, which I don’t do that often, something to the effect that *“If you’re feeling hopeless this Sunday morning, here’s an idea: go to church and hear of the grace and the mercy of God through Christ.”* Well, you would have thought I started World War III. *“Thanks, but no thanks. I’m not a Christian anymore because I don’t want Christians telling me how to live. I want to be queer, and I’m proud of it. I’m sick of people telling me I’m going to go to hell.”* Okay, but what does the Bible say? What does the Bible say? It speaks about an eternal hell. How are we going to have any impact on the culture if we’re not willing to speak about sin? The discussion ends when you’re not willing to speak about sin. It may end anyway, but at least you’ve caused the person to think about their life. Christians today live like the world in their morals instead of like Christ, instead of being conformed to His image. Jesus said, *“If we’re a friend of the world, we’re an enemy of God,”* but He didn’t mean by that that we can’t have friends in the world. He meant that we aren’t to be friendly with the ideologies of the world, the philosophies of the world, the morality redefined by the world.

Colossians 4:6. Turn there with me for a moment. How are you going to have an impact if you're not around unbelievers? Colossians 4:6: *“Let your speech always be gracious,”* listen to this, *“seasoned with salt.”* The way you talk around others has a preservative life-giving quality. What is that? Verse 6, the end of it, *“So that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”* Their questions about the gospel, their questions about eternity, their questions about life—this is our duty. We are to be at peace with all men, if possible, Romans 12:18, but especially believers, and that is what Jesus has in mind when He says there at the end of verse 50, *“Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”* This is not the peace of compromise. This is the peace of a collective front of boldly proclaiming the gospel, boldly calling out sin, and living consistent with what you're saying as the world watches, as the culture watches. You're *“at peace with one another”* in the fact that you're at peace and preaching the same gospel. You're at peace with other Christians because you preach the same gospel, you live the same kind of life, you are one with one another. And as individuals do that on a micro level, it has a macro result; the preservation of a culture, the preservation of society, collectively, generationally because we're looking for a heart change, right? Not merely regime change. This is nothing extraordinary. This is the ordinary life of the Christian. So, what do you need to do to engage in societal preservation of a corrupt culture?

Number one, you need to be around other believers. In fact, you need to be in a church full of other believers that you are committed to, that you are at peace with, you are one with, and collectively as the army of God, you are marching with to proclaim the gospel, to live forth the law of God. And when the world sees that, it is a powerful, powerful testimony. But secondly, you need to be around other nonbelievers. How are you going to influence the world when you're not around unbelievers? The Bible never calls us to isolation from the world, nor does it call us to assimilation in the world. It calls us to sanctification to God, but with that is the requirement that we will speak forth the glory of God to nonbelievers. To have a preserving Christian influence, what does it include? Little things. Let me list some, and let me borrow the language of young people today. You want to be a world-changer? Here's how you can be a world-changer; change your own little world and priorities. Preserve those around you. How? Provoke others in the culture to think about eternity. And how are you going to do that if you're not willing to tell them they are in sin? How do you suppose they're going to see their need for heaven if they don't see they're going to hell? It's impossible to do. Of course, you don't have to do that in an ugly way, and you shouldn't. You speak the truth in love, and when you do that, you'd be surprised how much they'll listen.

Provoke others in the culture to think about eternity. Secondly, elevate conversation, elevate it from the sordid and the superficial to the spiritual and the eternal. I am always shocked when I'm around other coaches at the language they use, and it's just expected. It's part of the culture. The kids expect it, and the kids mimic the coaches. I can't tell you how many times when I'm around a coach will begin to say something he shouldn't say and he'll turn me and he'll say, “I'm sorry, coach, I shouldn't say that. I'm sorry, I shouldn't say that.” My standard response is always this: “Don't worry about it. You don't have to answer to me; you have to answer to God,” and they know it. They know it. There is a preserving quality to the way that we interact with nonbelievers that should make a difference. They should see a difference in the way we speak and the way that we act. It causes them to think. How about this one? Restrain sin by promoting honesty and integrity in our dealings with nonbelievers in our community and our workplace, sports teams, homeschool co-ops.

The point is you can do a hundred little things, but what are you doing in your life where you are raising a God-consciousness in the heart of others? Because right now God has all but disappeared from the culture. So, what are you doing whereby you're raising God-consciousness in the lives that God has placed you to be around? The kingdom of God is built one block at a time. It's built generationally. It's built collectively. It is only built when you are the salt of the world in your own little world. We aren't monks. We don't live in a monastery, and I hope none of you move two hours away to a farm of one hundred acres where you never enter civilization again. There are some who think that's godly. That's ungodly to avoid the world by thinking that that's going to make you more holy. You are called to be holy by cutting the sin out of your life, cutting the temptation out of your life, not removing yourself from the world. And then once you do that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you're called to go back into the world and influence the world—not remove yourself.

You see, this is the essence of excellence in Christian living. It is radical, but it's simple. It is courageous, but it's clear. We are to be the flavor of the gospel to the world. We are to make the world thirsty for Christ through our salty, godly living, and we have the promise of Scripture that when Christians do that, they preserve a culture. They preserve a society. They build a society. Every culture and every society that has ever existed has been built upon the law of God, which is unalterable. It was true yesterday; it's true today. We save both ourselves and our hearers when we establish spiritual mutilation no matter the pain, we embrace sacrificial dedication no matter the trial, and we engage in societal preservation no matter the culture. We are to be salted with fire, living, breathing, flaming sacrifices for God in every aspect of our lives. And when we do that, we are blessed by God, and He blesses those around us. To Him be the glory. Let us pray.

Father, we thank You for the clarity of Your Word this morning on very serious matters. Always difficult to speak about the reality of hell, but in speaking about the reality of hell, there is the promise of heaven, and there is the hope of Christ. The agony of hell would not be what it is if there wasn't us looking forward to the joy and the blessedness that is found in Christ, found in heaven, found in embracing our Savior. Father, we pray that You would help us to embrace Him more. Lord, as we embrace Him, help us to embrace the altar of sacrifice. Help us to be willing to remove from our hearts, Lord, the things that would keep us from being the testimony we should be and perhaps keep us from heaven itself because it might reveal that we're not true Christians. Such a sobering reality, Lord. We pray that You would help all the hearts here to except and embrace this message from Your Word. As always, Lord, we pray if there are any who don't know Christ that they would come to know Christ. We pray that there would be believers among us, repenters among us in their own simple way and simple faith, trusting and clinging to Christ, looking to Him as their only Savior. And we trust, Lord, that as Your gospel is preached, You will call all Your sheep to Yourself. We thank You for what You will do in our hearts and in our lives through Your Word and in our midst and in Your church. We pray and ask all of these things in the blessed name of Christ, we pray. Amen.