

OUR SPIRITUAL DUTY (Mk. 9:42-50)

Mk. 9:42 And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. 43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 45 And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: 46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 47 And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: 48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. 49 For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. 50 Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.

How often have you heard someone say something like ... “the whole world is falling apart”, or “there’s enough food in the cupboard to feed an entire army”, or “he’s the worst driver in the world”? ... These are all *exaggerations* because the whole world is *not* falling apart, and there’s *not* enough food in the cupboard to feed an entire army, and he’s probably *not* the worst driver in the world ... These are all ‘hyperboles’ ... extreme exaggerations used to make a point. The word hyperbole is the opposite of the understatement, and comes from a Greek word meaning ‘excess’ (literally, “a throwing beyond”).

Here in this passage Jesus uses hyperboles ... Mk. 9:42 ... it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. 43 ... if thy hand offend thee, cut it off ... 45 ... if thy foot offend thee, cut it off ... 47 ... if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out ... Jesus was not advocating putting a literal millstone round someone’s neck and throwing them into the sea ... neither was He suggesting anyone should literally cut off their hand or their foot, or pluck out their eye. ... Mind you, the opponents of the early Christians actually accused the believers of cannibalism because they spread rumours the Christians were literally eating flesh and drinking blood when they came to celebrate the Lord’s Table. ... However, Christians were doing no such thing and Jesus was simply using hyperbole to teach His disciples.

Obviously the issue He was about to deal with was of such importance it benefitted from this form of language. Now, we have to be very careful how we understand what is being said here. ... What did Jesus *mean* when He gave this instruction to fully-grown men? What did He mean by using this very descriptive and graphic terminology? ... One thing it primarily demonstrates is how very different Christianity is to anything in this world, - Christians deviate from the norm. For example, we believe God is the Creator ... we believe in Jesus Christ as our Saviour ... we believe the Bible is the Word of God ... we believe in a Heaven to gain and a Hell to shun ... We believe many things other people don’t, and we believe them because they are what the Bible teaches. And because we believe the Bible we also behave differently

for we don't do many of the things the unsaved do which are contrary to what God teaches in His Word. And in this way, Christians deviate from the norm.

In fact, Peter in his epistle emphasises that when he describes us as a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people (I Peter 2:9) ... and by describing us as a 'peculiar' people he means we are set apart unto God, and therefore, different. We belong to Him. He has purchased us through the blood of His Son, we are no longer our own, we are *His* ... and, as a consequence, we are different. We think differently. We speak differently. We have different priorities ... the Jesus Christ is Who we follow, and He has changed us into something *different* from what the world produces.

So what is Jesus saying here to His twelve disciples? It is important to notice He *is* speaking to His disciples, - not to the crowds of unbelievers, but to the disciples, ³⁵ And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them. ... Previously, He had been teaching them about humility, ³⁵ ... If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all. ... Now, in v.42, He is teaching them, first of all, about love and respect among believers, - our relationship to other Christians, ⁴² And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones *that believe in me*.

This was particularly relevant at that time because of what John had previously mentioned, ^{Mk. 9:38} Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. ³⁹ But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ For he that is not against us is on our part. ... He was teaching them, - the disciples, - not to discourage or put up barriers between believers for ⁴² whosoever shall offend one of these little ones *that believe in me* ...

Also, the reference to the child, - these little ones ... Jesus described His disciples as 'little children', ^{Jn. 13:33} Little children, yet a little while I am with you. ... The disciple John copied the same analogy when he, - years later, - instructed his (*John's*) own disciples, ^{I Jn. 2:1} My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not ... ¹² I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven ... ¹³ ... I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father ... ¹⁸ Little children ... ²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him ... ^{I Jn. 3:7} Little children, let no man deceive you ... ^{4:4} Ye are of God, little children ... ^{5:21} Little children, keep yourselves from idols. ... Paul also used the same term when writing to the Galatians 4:19, My little children.

So Jesus was using this little child as an illustration to His disciples, and the point He was making develops out of Mk. 9:37, *Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me.* ... Christ lives in every believer ... and how you treat a fellow-believer is, therefore, how you treat Christ if He was here in person ... and how you treat Christ is ultimately how you treat God. Jesus would further explain this to them when they arrived in Jerusalem. On that occasion, - yet some months away, - He would be speaking about His second coming, **Mt. 25:31** *When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* ... This passage is speaking about the relationship of each believer for the other, for the sake of the Lord Jesus, and for the sake of His Father.

So, said Jesus to the disciples, **Mk. 9:42** *And whosoever shall offend ... the word is σκανδαλίζω, and it means 'who ever shall cause to stumble, to be led into sin, to become trapped in sin, to skandalize' ... whoever, in any way, feeds these minds with error, - one of these little ones [believers] that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.* ... Here in this passage, He is not advocating they should literally have a millstone put round their necks and cast off over the end of the harbour pier, but He is telling His disciples in very graphic form the gravity of putting obstacles in the way of fellow-believers. And what He is calling for is the kind of love, - especially between believers, - that works very hard never to be a source of sin or hindrance or temptation or a stumbling-block.

These are extreme terms He used, but it must have been necessary in order to 'get through' to His disciples. ... Sometimes, as Christians', we can be hard to

get through to ... and sometimes the Lord needs to be abrupt, to-the-point, and blunt ... otherwise we wouldn't 'get' what He's teaching us!

As well as teaching them about love for each other, Jesus also went on to teach them about purity and holiness, ⁴³ And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: ⁴⁴ Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. ⁴⁵ And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: ⁴⁶ Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. ⁴⁷ And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: ⁴⁸ Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. ... Chopping of your hand and your foot ... and poking out your eye! ... He doesn't mean it literally for a one-handed, one-footed, one eyed person is still a sinner! It doesn't make any difference to the soul! ... Instead, the lesson Jesus is teaching is about how you are never going to lead someone to be like Christ when there is something about you that does not match what you are saying.

Now again, look at these disciples and see the kind of people Jesus was teaching here. Some of them had a lot to learn ... We *all* have a lot to learn, and the responsibility we have is to learn together for the sake of the Lord's Kingdom. ... And this is strong language Jesus used! He did not 'tip-toe' round the issues, but He dealt with them 'head-on'!

On Thursday evenings we were recently studying the twelve disciples, and I'm sure we saw a lot of ourselves in some of them ... so we can identify with what Jesus is saying here. It is a serious business being a Christian, and there is no excuse for doing it half-heartedly because it impacts on others, and it impacts on the Lord. And that was the second lesson in these verses Jesus was teaching His disciples. ... Follow Christ in a way that brings glory, honour and pleasure to Him. ... Love your brother and sister in the Lord's sake, and seek after purity and holiness together for the Lord's sake ...

And this was a very practical lesson He was teaching them for He was teaching them. ... Peter, are you listening?! Beware of those Judaizers who are out to trick and deceive you into believing you have to fulfil the law before you become a 'proper' Christian (cf. Gal. 2:7,8) ... And Judas Iscariot, are you listening too, for beware of the allurements of the thirty pieces of silver the chief priests will be jangling in front of you! ... In extremely demonstrative

language, Jesus is instructing His twelve disciples to be zealous among themselves, and then later, zealous in leading new disciples.

As it was, - the twelve of them before Jesus, - how would *Peter* have taught new disciples? ... How would *Simon the Zealot* have taught them? How would *James and John* have taught them? ... In the very severest terms, - in order to get the message across, - Jesus used the language of hyperbole to ‘hammer’ home the point of the Christian’s influence. We see this slightly more developed in Matthew’s account of the conversation, **Mt. 18:6** *But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea ...* and then he adds, **7** *Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh! ...* A woe (ὠαί) is a form of curse. It indicates judgment ... And Jesus was telling His disciples to be careful not to lead anyone contrary to the word and will of God ... for it will bring a curse, a judgment, and a condemnation.

You expect the world to cause people to sin, - it is in the grip of the devil, and what else could you expect ... so therefore, it is understandable, **7** *Woe unto the world because of offences!* ... However, you don’t expect God’s people to lead each other into sin! What is out there in the world ought to be kept out there in the world and not to be introduced among the saints. ... God’s people are there to encourage each other in practical holy righteousness.

Just before we leave these verses ... These *disciples* are followers of the Lord Jesus ... why then is the warning concerning ‘Hell’ (γέεννα) issued in v.43, v.45, and v.47? They are being warned about not ending up in Hell! How can that be since these are the disciples?! Surely it is not relevant to warn professing followers of Christ about Hell? ... Why would you do it? ... Take a closer look at those men who were sitting at the feet of Jesus ... Judas Iscariot was there, listening and looking into the face of the Saviour ... The preaching of the Gospel of salvation is never wasted ... not even when it is spoken amongst God’s people for it is an encouragement to examine our place in belonging to the family of God, and to build each other up in the faith.

The language of hyperbole continues to be used in verses 49 and 50. In v. 49 we read, *For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. ...* What was Jesus saying? Ezra and Ezekiel help us to understand ... In the book of Ezra, King Darius made a decree for the house of the Lord to be

rebuilt in Jerusalem, - the first temple had previously been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. In preparation for the building of the second temple, - some seventy years later, on the Jews' return, - Darius gave instructions, [Ezra 6:9](#) And that which they have need of, both young bullocks, and rams, and lambs, for the burnt offerings of the God of heaven, wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the appointment of the priests which are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail ... salt was to be stored and used with the sacrifices. Ezekiel also records, [Ezek. 43:23](#) When thou hast made an end of cleansing it, thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. ²⁴ And thou shalt offer them before the LORD, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering unto the LORD.

So, how was this relevant to what Jesus was teaching the disciples in Mk. 9:49, For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt? Salt and fire were used in the sacrifice, mentioned in Ezra and Ezekiel ... so it was an Old Testament illustration the disciples would have understood ... And they also would have understood how the salt, - as a preservative, - symbolically preserves and secures the covenant God had made with them, i.e. His people. ...

Now, the origin of the salt and the sacrifice goes back further to Lev. 2:13 where salt, - once again, - symbolises the preservation and security of the promises of God's covenant as the offering is made, [Lk. 2:13](#) And every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt. ... The importance of the salt! ... This was referring to the grain offering ... Altogether there were five main offerings, - four of which were animal sacrifices which required atonement, i.e. the animal-sacrifice taking the place of the sinner to be reconciled with God (burnt offering, peace offering, sin offering, and guilt offering).

The fifth offering was the grain offering which was different in that it was not an animal offering or a sin offering ... and no blood was required. The grain offering was an offering of consecration. It symbolised the total devotion of the one bringing the offering to the Lord. ... You gather up the grain, and you bring it as a sacrifice and lay it on the altar. You then covered the grain on the altar with salt ... and you were acknowledging the truth of God's covenant-promise and how it symbolised your commitment to Him for the salt symbolised how the covenant was being preserved, as God had instructed.

This consecration represented the long-term, enduring, permanent relationship between the sinner and God. ... It is probably what Paul was referring to in Rom. 12:1, *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.*

... And it was how Jesus was speaking to the disciples about the salt ... about the permanence of their commitment to Him. Nothing less than endurance and faithfulness in the service of the Saviour, **49** *For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt.* ... You are being prepared and committed to the work ... and that is the standard of service God requires of His people.

Finally, v. 50 is very practical, **50** *Salt is good.* In some of the world's poorest countries salt is the affordable commodity for cleanliness and preservation. Nowadays, in chemical terms, salt, - sodium chloride, - doesn't lose its saltiness, no matter how long it is kept. However, in the ancient times, the salt *did* lose its saltiness ... so how do we understand what He was saying? ... Back then the different types of salt contained properties that made them 'go off', - become impure ... So, basically Jesus was saying ... salt is good, but when it is allowed to 'lie around' and not be used, it becomes contaminated, - and it is of no further use ... However, the way you stop salt becoming impure and contaminated is to use it! Use it so as not to allow it to become corrupted ... Keep it away from being mixed in with any harmful corrosives ... Keep it out on its own so it doesn't lose its saltiness ... because when it loses its saltiness, you might as well throw it out for it is no longer any use ... It is not doing what it is supposed to be doing. In other words, be careful you don't allow anything into your life that would affect you as a Christian, and which would bring you spiritual harm.

That is what Jesus was telling His disciples ... He had already told them something similar in the sermon on the mountain, **Mt. 5:13** *Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, - if it is tasteless by becoming contaminated, - wherewith shall it be salted? – How can you make it salty again? You can't! - it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.* ... You as a follower of the Lord Jesus are like the salt of the earth ... you have been given a purity as a Christian by the Lord Jesus. You have been saved to be a witness and to be a testimony to Him. You are a Christian, and you have to be as 'salt' ... But if you are not being as 'salt' ...

then, you are ‘laying yourself wide open’ to spiritual contamination. In the words of Jesus, *but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? The salt is no longer doing what it is supposed to be doing, and it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.*

... And the disciples would have understood everything Jesus was saying to them. Yes, there was a little child standing in their midst but the little child illustrated how *they* had to become concerning the fundamental principles of being a Christian. He required humility in His service, and love between each of them as believers so they would encourage each other and work together. He also required them to together follow after holiness, and again this impinged upon their relationships with each other, - encourage each other in the things of God! He told them also how sacrifice and obedience to His cause were the evidence of their true commitment.

Why was Jesus telling the disciples all this? ... To borrow from another passage, He was telling them all this *Jn. 2:25 for he knew what was in man.* ... He knew what they were like, and He had to tell them over and over again in order to penetrate into their understanding ... so they would listen and become what He required of them for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel. Someone has explained how the world does not read the Bible, but they read the lives of Christians ... What are they learning about us? Through us, what are they learning about the Lord Jesus?

Another illustration Jesus used was this, *Mt. 5:4 Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15 Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.* ... That about sums it up for it is what Jesus was teaching His disciples ... as He also continues to teach us today through His Word. Amen.