**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**MARK-047**. **SALT IN YOURSELVES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."*

*Mark 9:50*

In the context saltis employed to express the preserving, purifying, divine energy which is otherwise spoken of as fire. The two emblems produce the same result. They both salt--that is, they cleanse and keep. And if in the one we recognise the quick energy of the Divine Spirit as the central idea, no less are we to see the same typified under a slightly different aspect in the other. The fire transforms into its own substance and burns away all the grosser particles. The salt arrests corruption, keeps off destruction, and diffuses its sanative influence through all the particles of the substance with which it comes in contact. And in both metaphors it is the operation of God's cleansing Spirit, in its most general form, that is set forth, including all the manifold ways by which God deals with us to purge us from our iniquity, to free us from the death which treads close on the heels of wrongdoing, the decomposition and dissolution which surely follow on corruption.

This the disciples are exhorted to have in themselves that they may be at peace one with another. Perhaps we shall best discover the whole force of this saying by dealing--

**I. With the symbol itself and the ideas derived from it.**

The salt cleanses, arrests corruption which impends over the dead masses, sweetens and purifies, and so preserves from decay and dissolution. It works by contact, and within the mass. It thus stands as an emblem of the cleansing which God brings, both in respect (a) to that on which it operates, (b) to the purpose of its application, and (c) to the manner in which it produces its effects.

**(a)** That on which it operates.

There is implied here a view of human nature, not flattering but true. It is compared with a dead thing, in which the causes that bring about corruption are already at work, with the sure issue of destruction. This in its individual application comes to the assertion of sinful tendency and actual sin as having its seat and root in all our souls, so that the present condition is corruption, and the future issue is destruction. The consequent ideas are that any power which is to cleanse must come from without, not from within; that purity is not to be won by our own efforts, and that there is no disposition in human nature to make these efforts. There is no recuperative power in human nature. True, there may be outward reformation of habits, etc., but, if we grasp the thought that the taproot of sin is selfishness, this impotence becomes clearer, and it is seen that sin affects all our being, and that therefore the healing must come from beyond us.

**(b)** The purpose--namely, cleansing.

In salt we may include the whole divine energy; the Word, the Christ, the Spirit. So the intention of the Gospel is mainly to make clean. Preservation is a consequence of that.

**(c)** The manner of its application.

Inward, penetrating, by contact; but mainly the great peculiarity of Christian ethics is that the inner life is dealt with first, the will and the heart, and afterwards the outward conduct.

**II. The part which we have to take in this cleansing process.**

Have saltis a command; and this implies that while all the cleansing energy comes from God, the working of it on our souls depends on ourselves.

**(a)** Its original reception depends on our faith.

The saltis here, but our contact with it is established by our acceptance of it. There is no magical cleansing; but it must be received within if we would share in its operation.

**(b)** Its continuous energy is not secured without our effort.

Let us just recall the principle already referred to, that the saltimplies the whole cleansing divine energies, and ask what are these? The Bible variously speaks of men as being cleansed by the blood of Christ, by the truth, by the Spirit. Now, it is not difficult to bring all these into one focus, viz., that the Spirit of God cleanses us by bringing the truth concerning Christ to bear on our understandings and hearts.

We are sanctified in proportion as we are coming under the influence of Christian truth, which, believed by our understandings and our hearts, supplies motives to our wills which lead us to holiness by copying the example of Christ.

Hence the main principle is that the cleansing energy operates on us in proportion as we are influenced by the truths of the Gospel.

* Again, it works in proportion as we seek for, and submit to, the guidance of God's Holy Spirit.
* In proportion as we are living in communion with Christ.
* In proportion as we seek to deny ourselves and put away those evil things which quench the Spirit.

This great grace, then, is not ours without our own effort. No original endowment is enough to keep us right. There must be the daily contact with, and constant renewing of the Holy Ghost. Hence arises a solemn appeal to all Christians.

Note the independence of the Christian character.

In yourselves. The water that I shall give him shall be in him a fountain, etc. Not, therefore, derived from the world, nor at second-hand from other men, but you have access to it for yourselves. See that you use the gift. Hold fast that which thou hast, for there are enemies to withstand--carelessness, slothfulness, and self-confidence, etc.

**III. The relation to one another of those who possess this energy.**

In proportion as Christians have salt in themselves, they will be at peace with one another. Remember that all sin is selfishness; therefore if we are cleansed from it, that which leads to war, alienation, and coldness will be removed. Even in this world there will be an anticipatory picture of the perfect peace which will abound when all are holy. Even now this great hope should make our mutual Christian relations very sweet and helpful.

Thus emerges the great principle that the foundation of the only real love among men must be laid in holiness of heart and life. Where the Spirit of God is working on a heart, there the seeds of evil passions are stricken out. The causes of enmity and disturbance are being removed. Men quarrel with each other because their pride is offended, or because their passionate desires after earthly things are crossed by a successful rival, or because they deem themselves not sufficiently respected by others. The root of all strife is self-love. It is the root of all sin. The cleansing which takes away the root removes in the same proportion the strife which grows from it. We should not be so ready to stand on our rights if we remembered how we come to have any hopes at all. We should not be so ready to take offence if we thought more of Him who is not soon angry. All the train of alienations, suspicions, earthly passions, which exist in our minds and are sure to issue in quarrels or bad blood, will be put down if we have salt in ourselves.

This makes a very solemn appeal to Christian men. The Church is the garden where this peace should flourish. The disgrace of the Church is its envyings, jealousies, ill-natured scandal, idle gossip, love of pre-eminence, willingness to impute the worst possible motives to one another, sharp eyes for our brother's failings and none for our own. I am not pleading for any mawkish sentimentality, but for a manly peacefulness which comes from holiness. The holiest natures are always the most generous.

What a contrast the Church ought to present to the prevailing tone in the world! Does it? Why not? Because we do not possess the salt. The dove flees from the cawing of rooks and the squabbling of kites and hawks.

The same principle applies to all our human affections. Our loves of all sorts are safe only when they are pure. Contrast the society based on common possession of the one Spirit with the companionships which repose on sin, or only on custom or neighbourhood. In all these there are possibilities of moral peril.

The same principle intensified gives us a picture of heaven and of hell. In the one are the solemn troops and sweet societies; in the other, no peace, no confidence, no bonds, only isolation, because sin which is selfishness lies at the foundation of the awful condition.

Friends, without that salt our souls are dead and rotting. Here is the great cure. Make it your own. So purified, you will be preserved, but, on the other hand, unchecked sin leads to quick destruction.

The dead, putrefying carcass--what a picture of a soul abandoned to evil and fit only for Gehenna!