

THE TEACHING LEGACY OF DEREK PRINCE

The Salt of the Earth Our presence makes all the difference

“You are the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13). In this statement, Jesus is not only speaking to His disciples, but to all of us who acknowledge the authority of His teaching. Jesus compares our function on the earth to that of salt. His meaning becomes clear when we consider two familiar uses of salt in relation to food: salt gives flavor and salt restrains corruption.

Salt Gives Flavor

As Christians, our function as salt is to give flavor to the earth. God enjoys this flavor. Unappetizing food becomes tasty and acceptable when seasoned with salt. Job asks this rhetorical question: *“Can flavorless food be eaten without salt?”* (Job 6:6). The presence of salt makes the difference, causing us to enjoy food we would otherwise refuse to eat.

Our presence makes the earth acceptable to God and commends the earth to His mercy. Because we are here, God continues to deal with the earth in grace and mercy rather than in wrath and judgment. Our presence makes the difference.

This principle is vividly illustrated in the account of Abraham’s intercession on behalf of Sodom, as recorded in Genesis 18:16–33. The Lord told Abraham that He was going to Sodom to see if that city’s wickedness had come to the point where judgment could no longer be withheld. Abraham then walked with the Lord on His way and reasoned with Him about the situation.

A Principle of Judgment

Abraham first established a principle that was the basis for what followed: It is never the will of God that the judgment due to the wicked should come upon the righteous. *“Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?”* Abraham asked (verse 23). *“Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”* (verse 25).

The Lord makes it clear in the ensuing conversation that He accepts the principle stated by Abraham. How important it is that all believers understand this! If we have been made righteous by faith in Christ and are leading lives that truly express our faith, then it is never God’s will that we be included in the judgments He brings upon the wicked.

Two Defining Factors

Unfortunately, Christians often do not understand



this. Why? Because they fail to distinguish between two situations which outwardly may appear similar, but which in reality are completely different in nature and cause. On the one hand, there is persecution for the sake of righteousness. On the other hand, there is God's judgment upon the wicked.

The difference between these two situations is brought out by the following contrasted statements. Persecution comes from the wicked upon the righteous. But judgment comes from God, who is righteous, upon the wicked. Thus, persecution for righteousness and judgment for wickedness are opposites in their origin, purpose and result.

The Bible plainly warns that Christians must expect to suffer persecution. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to His disciples, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and shall say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake*" (Matthew 5:10–11). Paul writes likewise to Timothy: "*Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*" (2 Timothy 3:12). Christians must therefore be prepared to endure persecution for their faith and their way of life, and even to count this as a privilege.

By the same token, Christians should never be included in God's judgments upon the wicked. This principle is stated many times in Scripture. In 1 Corinthians 11:32 Paul writes to his fellow believers, and says, "*But when we [Christians] are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.*" This demonstrates that there is a difference between God's dealings with believers

and His dealings with the world. As believers, we may expect to experience God's chastening. If we submit to the chastening and set our lives in order, then we are not subject to the judgments that come upon unbelievers or the world in general. The end purpose of God's chastening us as believers is to preserve us from undergoing His judgments on unbelievers.

Exodus chapters 7 through 12 record how God brought ten judgments of ever-increasing severity upon the Egyptians because they refused to listen to His prophets, Moses and Aaron. Throughout all this, God's people Israel dwelt in the midst of Egypt, but not one of the ten judgments touched them. In Exodus 11:7 the reason is graphically stated: "*But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move his tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.*" Judgment did not come upon Israel because the Lord "*made a difference*" between His own people and the people of Egypt. Even the dogs of Egypt had to acknowledge this difference! And the difference is valid to this day.

How Many Are Enough?

Continuing his conversation with the Lord concerning Sodom, Abraham attempted to ascertain the least number of righteous persons needed to preserve the whole city from judgment. He began with fifty. Then, with a remarkable combination of reverence and perseverance, he worked his way down to ten. The Lord finally assured Abraham that if He found only ten righteous persons in Sodom, He would spare the whole city for the sake of those ten.

What was the population of Sodom? It would be difficult to arrive at an exact estimate. However, figures are available for certain other cities of ancient Palestine that provide a standard of comparison. Taking these other cities into account, we could say that the population of Sodom in Abraham's day was probably not less than ten thousand.

God assured Abraham that ten righteous persons by their very presence could preserve a city of at least ten thousand. This gives a ratio of one to a thousand. The same ratio of "*one among a thousand*" is given in Job 33:23 and in Ecclesiastes 7:28, and both of these passages suggest that the *one* is a person of outstanding righteousness, while all the remainder fall below God's standards.

It is easy to extend this ratio indefinitely. The presence of ten righteous persons can preserve a community of ten thousand. The presence of a hundred righteous persons can preserve a community of one hundred thousand. The presence of one thousand righteous persons can preserve a community of one million. How many righteous persons are needed to preserve a nation as large as the United States, with its estimated population of a little more than 300 million? About 300 thousand persons.

These figures are evocative. Does Scripture give us grounds to believe that, for example, just over a quarter of a million truly righteous persons, scattered as grains of salt across the United States, would suffice to preserve the entire nation from God's judgment and to ensure the continuance of His grace and mercy? It would be foolish to claim that such estimates are exact. Nevertheless, the Bible definitely establishes the general principle that the

presence of righteous believers is the decisive factor in God's dealings with a community.

This leads us to the second effect of the presence of Christians as "the salt of the earth."

Salt Restrains Corruption

In the days before artificial refrigeration, sailors who took meat on long voyages used salt as a preservative. The process of corruption was already at work before the meat was salted. Salting did not abolish the corruption, but it held it in check for the duration of the voyage so that the sailors could continue to eat the meat long after it would have become inedible.

Our presence on the earth as Christ's disciples operates like the salt in the meat. The process of sin's corruption is already at work. This is manifested in every area of human life—moral, religious, social, political. We cannot abolish the corruption that is already present. But we can hold it in check long enough for God's purposes of grace and mercy to be fully worked out. Then, when our influence is no longer felt, corruption will come to its climax, and the result will be total degradation.

This illustration from the power of salt to restrain corruption explains Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12. Paul warns that human wickedness will come to its climax in the person of a world ruler supernaturally empowered and directed by Satan himself. Paul calls this ruler "*the man of sin* [or lawlessness]" and "*the son of perdition*" (verse 3). In 1 John 2:18 he is called "*Antichrist*," and in Revelation 13:4 he is called "*the beast*." This ruler will actually claim to be God and de-

mand universal worship.

Emergence of this satanic ruler is inevitable. Paul says with certainty, "*Then the lawless one will be revealed*" (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Paul also declares in the same verse that the true Christ Himself will be the one to administer final judgment upon this false Christ—"whom the Lord will consume with the breath [or spirit] of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."

Unfortunately some preachers have used this teaching about Antichrist to instill in Christians attitudes of passivity and fatalism. "Antichrist is coming," they have said. "Things are getting worse and worse. There is nothing we can do about it." As a result, Christians have all too often sat back with hands folded in pious dismay and watched the ravages of Satan proceed unchecked all around them.

The attitudes of passivity and fatalism are as tragic as they are unscriptural. It is true that Antichrist must eventually emerge. But it is far from true that there is nothing to be done about him in the meanwhile.

The Restraining Force

To this present moment there is a force at work in the world that challenges, resists and restrains the spirit of antichrist.

This restraining power, which at present holds back the full and final emergence of Antichrist, is the personal presence of the Holy Spirit within the Church. This becomes clear as we follow the unfolding revelation of Scripture concerning the Person and the work of the Holy Spirit.

At the very beginning of the Bible, in Genesis 1:2, we are told that "*the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters*." From then on throughout

the Old Testament there are frequent references to the activity of the Holy Spirit in the earth. However, at the close of His earthly ministry, Jesus promised His disciples that the Holy Spirit would shortly come to them in a new way, different from anything that had ever taken place on earth up to that time.

The Promised Helper

In John 14:16–17 Jesus gives this promise: "*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [Comforter], that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth [a title of the Holy Spirit], ... for He dwells with you and will be in you.*" We may paraphrase this promise of Jesus as follows: "I have been with you in personal presence three-and-a-half years, and I am now about to leave you. After I have gone, another Person will come to take My place. This Person is the Holy Spirit. When He comes, He will remain with you forever."

This exchange of persons promised by Jesus was effected in two stages: first, the ascension of Jesus into heaven; then, ten days later, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. At this point in history, the Holy Spirit descended as a Person from heaven and took up His residence on earth. He is now the personal representative of the Godhead resident on earth. His actual dwelling place is the body of true believers, called collectively "*the Church*." To this body of believers Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:16: "*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*"

The great ministry of the Holy Spirit within the Church is to prepare a completed body for Christ. After completion, this body will, in turn, be

presented to Christ as a bride is presented to a bridegroom. As soon as this ministry of the Holy Spirit within the Church is finished, He will again be withdrawn from the earth, taking with Him the completed body of Christ. Thus, we may reword Paul's statement in 2 Thessalonians 2:7 as follows: "The Holy Spirit who now holds the Antichrist in check will continue to do so until He is withdrawn."

In the world is the spirit of antichrist, working toward the emergence of Antichrist himself. In the disciples of Christ is the Holy Spirit, holding back the emergence of Antichrist. Therefore the disciples who are indwelt by the Holy Spirit act as a barrier, holding back the climax of lawlessness and the final emergence of Antichrist. Only when the Holy Spirit, together with the completed body of Christ's disciples, is withdrawn from the earth, will the forces of lawlessness be able to proceed without restraint to the culmination of their purposes in Antichrist. Meanwhile, it is both the privilege and the responsibility of Christ's disciples, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to "overcome" the forces of Antichrist and to hold them in check.

Successful Salt

As the salt of the earth, we who are Christ's disciples therefore have two primary responsibilities. First, by our presence we commend the earth to God's continuing grace and mercy. Second, by the power of the Holy Spirit within us we hold in check the forces of corruption and lawlessness until God's appointed time.

In fulfilling these responsibilities, the Church stands as the barrier to the accomplishment of Satan's supreme ambition, which is to gain dominion

over the whole earth. This explains why Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:3: "*the falling away comes first, and the man of sin [Antichrist] is revealed.*" The word translated "falling away" is literally *apostasy*, that is, a departure from the faith.

So long as the Church stands firm and uncompromising in its faith, it has the power to hold back the final manifestation of Antichrist. Satan himself fully understands this, and therefore his primary objective is to undermine the faith and righteousness of the Church. Once he achieves this, the barrier to his purposes is removed, and the way is open for him to gain both spiritual and political control over the whole earth.

Suppose that Satan succeeds, because we, as Christians, fail to fulfill our responsibilities. What then? Jesus Himself gives us the answer. We become "*salt that has lost its savor.*" He warns us of the fate that awaits such savorless salt: "*It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men*" (Matthew 5:13).

"*Good for nothing!*" That is severe condemnation indeed. What follows? We are "*thrown out*"—rejected by God. Then we are "*trampled underfoot by men.*" Men become the instruments of God's judgment upon a saltless, apostate Church. If we in the Church fail to hold back the forces of wickedness, our judgment is to be handed over to those very forces.

Paul clearly presents us two alternatives in Romans 12:21: "*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*" There are only two choices: either to overcome or to be overcome. There is no middle ground, no third course open to us. We may use the good that God has put at our disposal to overcome the evil that confronts us.

But if we fail to do this, then that very evil will in turn overcome us.

This message applies with special urgency to those of us who live in lands where we still enjoy liberty to proclaim and to practice our Christian faith. In many lands today Christians have lost this liberty. At the same time, multiplied millions of people in those lands have been systematically indoctrinated to hate and to despise Christianity and all that it stands for. To people thus indoctrinated there could be no greater satisfaction than to trample under their feet those Christians who are not already under their yoke.

If we heed the warning of Jesus and fulfill our function as salt in the earth, we have the power to prevent this. If we default and suffer the judgment that follows, the bitterest reflection will be: It need never have happened.

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