

It's only been over the past 25 years or so that salt has gotten a bad rap. Studies showed that large amounts of salt in your diet can lead to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and other health problems. That medical news led many to reduce, or even cut salt completely out of their diets.

But salt isn't all bad, in fact, there are lots of good uses for salt.

- Yes, if you get it in your eyes it burns, but your tears contain salt. Those who wear contacts use a saline, or salt solution.
- Added to the water softener system in your home, it improves the quality of your water.
- Sprinkled on food in moderation, it enhances the taste.
- It melts winter ice on our streets and sidewalks so they're not dangerous and slippery.
- Pink Himalayan salt chunks promote health and wellness.
- If you made homemade ice cream growing up, remember how you packed rock salt and ice around that metal canister and then turned that handle until you had delicious ice cream?

Having completed a refresher course on salt uses today, what does the Bible say about salt? In the OT, God commanded that a fellowship offering of food needed to be salted. Salt made the offering more valuable. In NT times, and until the invention of refrigeration, salt was used as a preservative to keep food from spoiling. Exactly what is Jesus getting at when he introduces salt into our lesson by saying: **“Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves”?**

Jesus wants us to know that salt is a good thing. In this case, it's something inside his disciples. That's why he strongly encourages, no, he insists that we: **“Be a Salty Disciple.”** How is that possible? *By ... 1) Encouraging others, 2) Not causing others to stumble, 3) Keeping ourselves filled up with the Word.*

Two weeks ago, we heard the disciples arguing about who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. They were all wrapped up in their *“pecking order.”* You can tell it was a competition for them by how they got along with each other, and how they treated other believers. **“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.”**

They had issues with this man. Jesus had given them the authority to drive out demons. He wasn't one of them, so they told him to stop.

While John's words did show some concern for Jesus, what they really showed was a selfish concern for themselves. If John was looking for a pat on the back, he wouldn't find it here: **“Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us.”**

This man's use of Jesus' name brought honor to Jesus. It revealed his heart. He was a believer who loved the name of Jesus. When it comes to a relationship with Jesus, either a person is with him or against him. This man wasn't their enemy. He was on their side.

This same selfish sin has been repeated again and again throughout the centuries of the Christian church. You'd think that people trying to chase out demons would let each other go at it. But instead of celebrating their devil defeating successes, selfishness and jealousy grew in their hearts.

This can also happen in a Christian congregation. When some get involved in ministry, others can get jealous of them. Instead of banding together with those serving, they're critical of the way others are serving. A conflict breaks out when we're supposed to be a team. And the whole time the devil keeps doing his thing and laughing.

What was Jesus main concern? *His Name!* As long as they were doing miracles in his name, they can't do damage to his name, so there's no reason to stop them. God can use others besides you to serve. This is another one of Jesus' many lessons on humility.

Don't worry about who's chasing away demons, as long as it's done in Jesus' name. Don't worry about who's teaching and preaching in the name of Jesus even if they aren't part of our specific group.

What we need to worry about ... is our own example: **"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea."**

Have you asked yourself lately: *Does my life – my actions and my words – lead others to Jesus, or does it lead them to sin?* Yes, it's a terrible thing for me to sin and stumble from faith in Jesus. What's even worse though, is one believer causing another believer to stumble from their faith in Jesus.

That's why Jesus shockingly recommends removing that person by tossing them in the sea with a large stone around their neck before they can do damage to someone else's faith.

By the way, the **"little ones"** mentioned here it does include infants when it comes to their age, but it also includes those who are infants when it comes to their faith, no matter how old they are.

Not only does Jesus warn me about causing others to stumble in their faith – Jesus uses some pretty graphic pictures to warn me about what can happen if I stumble in my faith, because that can lead to hell. Hell is a real place **where the fire never goes out, and where the worms that eat them do not die**, and just in case you missed it the first time, Jesus feels it bears repeating: **the fire is not quenched.**

Hell is a painful place. The fire burns, but it doesn't burn enough to put someone out of their misery. The disgusting maggots eat the rotting flesh, but not enough to put someone out of their misery.

What are we willing to do to avoid hell? Jesus alerts us that it must be avoided at all costs. **"If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if**

**your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell."**

A surgeon might have to do the same thing to save a person's life. If a hand, a foot, or an eye has a life-threatening infection it endangers the whole body. The surgeon needs to remove the infected part to save that person's life.

Jesus means exactly what he says here. If something causes you to sin and endangers your salvation, the solution ... remove it. Turn off the TV. Step away from the computer. Throw away that book. Break off a friendship. Change jobs. Get rid of a personal habit ... if it is leading you away from faith in Jesus.

Remember why you will be welcomed into heaven. You are going to heaven because Jesus fulfilled his prediction of being *"cut off"* from the land of the living on the cross, and *"cut off"* from his Father's love. His question: **"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"** identifies when his relationship with his Father was chopped off. Just so that your relationship with him could be mended and fixed.

Jesus wraps up today's lesson with his *"salty"* talk: **"Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."**

In Matthew, Jesus calls his disciples *"the salt of the earth."* Here, the salt he's talking about is the Word of God inside the disciples, in their hearts – preserving their faith.

Sometimes this salt, this Word of God in us, will burn ... as God's law points out our sinful behavior it burns like salt on a wound, or sweat in your eyes. Sometimes this salt, this Word of God in us, will soothe and heal ... as God's good news gospel pardons and forgives.

Just as table salt can lose its saltiness, so we need to be aware that we can lose our spiritual *"saltiness"* if we stop using God's Word to preserve our faith and guide us in our Christian walk.

To ***Be a Salty Disciple*** and remain one, we need to keep ourselves filled with God's Word ... listen to it, read it, sing it, memorize it, speak it.