

CHAPTER 9

In this chapter, we have,

- I. Christ's transfiguration upon the mount (v. 1-13).
- II. His casting the devil out of a child, when the disciples could not do it (v. 14-29).
- III. His prediction of his own sufferings and death (v. 30-32).
- IV. The check he gave to his disciples for disputing who should be greatest (v. 33-37); and to John for rebuking one who cast out devils in Christ's name, and did not follow with them (v. 38-41).
- V. Christ's discourse with his disciples of the danger of offending one of his little ones (v. 42), and of indulging that in ourselves, which is an offence and an occasion of sin to us (v. 43-50), most of which passages we had before, Matthew 17 and 18.

◀ MARK 9:1-13

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Here is,

- I. A prediction of Christ's kingdom now near approaching, v. 1. That which is foretold, is,
 1. That the *kingdom of God* would *come*, and would come so as to be *seen*: the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up in the world by the utter destruction of the Jewish polity, which stood in the way of it; this was the restoring of the kingdom of God among men, which had been in a manner lost by the woeful degeneracy both of Jews and Gentiles.
 2. That it would come *with power*, so as to make its own way, and bear down the opposition that was given to it. It came *with power*, when vengeance was taken on the Jews for crucifying Christ, and when it conquered the idolatry of the Gentile world.

3. That it would come while some now *present were alive*; There are some *standing here, that shall not taste of death*, till they see it; this speaks the same with ^{<4284>}Matthew 24:34, *This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled*. Those that were standing here with Christ, should see it, when the others could not discern it to be the kingdom of God, for it came not with observation.

II. A specimen of that kingdom in the transfiguration of Christ, *six days* after Christ spoke that prediction. He had begun to give notice to his disciples of his death and sufferings; and, to prevent their offence at that, he gives them this glimpse of his glory, to show that his sufferings were voluntary, and what a virtue the dignity and glory of his person would put into them, and to prevent the *offence of the cross*.

1. It was on the top of a *high mountain*, like the converse Moses had with God, which was on the top of mount Sinai, and his prospect of Canaan from the top of mount Pisgah. Tradition saith, It was on the top of the mount Tabor that Christ was transfigured; and if so, the scripture was fulfilled, *Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name*, ^{<4882>}Psalms 89:12. Dr. Lightfoot, observing that the last place where we find Christ was in the coasts of Caesarea-Philippi, which was far from mount Tabor, rather thinks it was a high mountain which Josephus speaks of, near Caesarea.

2. The witnesses of it were Peter, James, and John; these were the *three* that were to *bear record on earth*, answering to Moses, Elias, and the *voice from heaven*, the three that were to bear record from above. Christ did not take all the disciples with him, because the thing was to be kept very private. As there are distinguishing favours which are given to disciples and not to the world, so there are to some disciples and not to others. All the saints are a people *near to Christ*, but some lie in his bosom. James was the first of all the twelve that died for Christ, and John survived them all, to be the last eyewitness of this glory; he bore record (^{<4014>}John 1:14); *We saw his glory*: and so did Peter, ^{<4016>}2 Peter 1:16-18.

3. The manner of it; *He was transfigured before them*; he appeared in another manner than he used to do. This was a change of the accidents, the substance remaining the same, and it was a miracle. But transubstantiation, the change of the substance, all the accidents remaining the same, is not a miracle, but a fraud and imposture, such a work as Christ never wrought. See what a great change human bodies are capable

of, when God is pleased to put an honour upon them, as he will upon the bodies of the saints, at the resurrection. He was transfigured *before them*; the change, it is probable, was *gradual*, from glory to glory, so that the disciples, who had their eye upon him all the while, had the clearest and most certain evidence they could have, that this glorious appearance was no other than the blessed Jesus himself, and there was no illusion in it. John seems to refer to this (~~1~~ 1 John 1:1), when he speaks of the *word of life*, as that which they had *seen with their eyes, and looked upon*. His *raiment became shining*; so that, though probably, it was sad-coloured, if not black, yet it was now *exceeding white as snow*, beyond what the fuller's art could do toward whitening it.

4. His companions in this glory were Moses and Elias (v. 4); They appeared *talking with him*, not to *teach* him, but to *testify* to him, and to be *taught* by him; by which it appears that there are converse and intercourse between glorified saints, they have ways of talking one with another, which we understand not. Moses and Elias lived at a great distance of time one from another, but that breaks no squares in heaven, where the *first shall be last, and the last first*, that is, all one in Christ.

5. The great delight that the disciples took in seeing this sight, and hearing this discourse, is expressed by Peter, the mouth of the rest; *He said, Master, it is good for us to be here*, v. 5. Though Christ was transfigured, and was in discourse with Moses and Elias, yet he gave Peter leave to speak to him, and to be as free with him as he used to be. Note, Our Lord Jesus, in his exaltation and glory, doth not at all abate of his condescending kindness to his people. Many, when they are in their greatness, oblige their friends to keep their distance; but even to the glorified Jesus true believers have access with boldness, and freedom of speech with him. Even in this heavenly discourse there was room for Peter to put in a word; and this is it, "*Lord, it is good to be here, it is good for us to be here; here let us make tabernacles; let this be our rest for ever.*" Note, Gracious souls reckon it *good to be* in communion with Christ, good to be near him, good to be *in the mount* with him, though it be a cold and solitary place; it is good to be here retired from the world, and alone with Christ: and if it is good to be with Christ transfigured only upon a mountain with Moses and Elias, how good it will be to be with Christ glorified in heaven with all the saints! But observe, While Peter was for staying here, he forgot what need there was of the presence of Christ, and the preaching of his apostles, among the people. At this very time, the

other disciples wanted them greatly, v. 14. Note, When it is well with us, we are apt to be mindless of others, and in the fulness of our *enjoyments* to forget the *necessities* of our brethren; it was a weakness in Peter to prefer private communion with God before public usefulness. Paul is willing to *abide in the flesh*, rather than depart to the mountain of glory (though that be far better), when he sees it needful for the church, ^{<1024>}Philippians 1:24, 25. Peter talked of making three distinct tabernacles for Moses, Elias, and Christ, which was not well-contrived; for such a perfect harmony there is between the law, the prophets, and the gospel, that one tabernacle will hold them all; they dwell together in unity. But whatever was incongruous in what he said, he may be excused, for they were all *sore afraid*; and he, for his part, *wist not what to say* (v. 6), not knowing what would be the end thereof.

6. The voice that came from heaven, was an attestation of Christ's mediatorship, v. 7. *There was a cloud that overshadowed them*, and was a shelter to them. Peter had talked of making tabernacles for Christ and his friends; but *while he yet spoke*, see how his project was superseded; this cloud was unto them instead of tabernacles for their shelter (^{<2045>}Isaiah 4:5); while he *spoke* of his tabernacles, God created his tabernacle *not made with hands*. Now out of this cloud (which was but a shade to *the excellent glory* Peter speaks of, whence *this voice* came) it was said, *This is my beloved Son, hear him*. God owns him, and accepts him, as his beloved Son, and is ready to accept of us in him; we must then own and accept him as our beloved Saviour, and must give up ourselves to be ruled by him.

7. The vision, being designed only to introduce the voice, when that was delivered, disappeared (v. 8); *Suddenly when they had looked round about*, as men amazed to see where they were, all was gone, *they saw no man any more*. Elias and Moses were vanished out of sight, and Jesus only remained with them, and he not transfigured, but as he used to be. Note, Christ doth not leave the soul, when extraordinary joys and comforts leave it. Though more sensible and ravishing communications may be withdrawn, Christ's disciples have, and shall have, his ordinary presence with them always, even to the end of the world, and that is it we must depend upon. Let us thank God for *daily bread* and not expect a continual feast on this side of heaven.

8. We have here the discourse between Christ and his disciples, as they came down from the mount.

(1.) He charged them to keep this matter very private, till he was *risen from the dead*, which would complete the proof of his divine mission, and then this must be produced with the rest of the evidence, v. 9. And besides, he, being now in a state of humiliation, would have nothing publicly taken notice of, that might be seen disagreeable to such a state; for to that he would in every thing accommodate himself. This enjoining of silence to the disciples, would likewise be of use to them, to prevent their boasting of the intimacy they were admitted to, that they might not be *puffed up* with the *abundance of the revelations*. It is a mortification to a man, to be tied up from telling of his advancements, and may help to hide pride from him.

(2.) The disciples were at a loss what the *rising from the dead* should mean; they could not form any notion of the Messiah's dying (~~cf.~~ Luke 18:34), and therefore were willing to think that the *rising* he speaks of, was figurative, his rising from his present mean and low estate to the dignity and dominion they were in expectation of. But if so, here is another thing that embarrasses them (v. 11); *Why say the Scribes*, that before the appearing of the Messiah in his glory, according to the order settled in the prophecies of the Old Testament, *Elias must first come?* But Elias was gone, and Moses too. Now that which raised this difficulty, was, the scribes taught them to expect the person of Elias, whereas the prophecy intended one *in the spirit and power of Elias*. Note, The misunderstanding of scripture is a great prejudice to the entertainment of truth.

(3.) Christ gave them a key to the prophecy concerning Elias (v. 12, 13); "It is indeed prophesied that Elias will come, and will *restore all things*, and set them to rights; and (though you will not understand it) it is also prophesied of the *Son of man*, that he must *suffer many things*, and be *set at nought*, must be a reproach of men, and despised of the people: and though the scribes do not tell you so, the *scriptures* do, and you have as much reason to expect that as the other, and should not *make so strange* of it; but as to Elias, I tell you *he is come*; and if you consider a little, you will understand whom I mean, it is one to whom they have *done whatsoever they listed*;" which was very applicable to the ill usage they had given John Baptist. Many of the ancients, and the Popish writers generally, think, that besides the coming of John Baptist in the spirit of Elias, himself in his own person is to be expected, with Enoch, before the second appearance of Christ, wherein the prophecy of Malachi will have a

more full accomplishment than it had in John Baptist. But it is groundless fancy; the true Elias, as well as the true Messiah promised, is come, and we are to look for *no other*. These words *as it is* written of him, refer not to their *doing to him whatever they listed* (that comes in a parenthesis), but only to his coming. He is come, and hath been, and done, according as was *written of him*.

◀94▶ MARK 9:14-29

THE EXPULSION OF AN EVIL SPIRIT

We have here the story of Christ casting the devil out of a child, somewhat more fully related than it was in ~~◀174▶~~ Matthew 17:14, etc. Observe here,

I. Christ's return to his disciples, and the perplexity he found them in. He laid aside his robes of glory, and came to look after his family, and to enquire what was become of them. Christ's glory above does not make him forget the concerns of his church below, which he visits in *great humility*, v. 14. And he came very seasonably, when the disciples were embarrassed and run a-ground; the scribes, who were sworn enemies both to him and them, had gained an advantage against them. A child possessed with a devil was brought to them, and they could not cast out the devil, whereupon the scribes insulted over them, and reflected upon their Master, and triumphed as if the day were their own. He *found the scribes questioning with them*, in the hearing of the multitude, some of whom perhaps began to be shocked by it. Thus Moses, when he came down from the mount, found the camp of Israel in great disorder; so soon were Christ and Moses missed. Christ's return was very welcome, no doubt, to the disciples, and *unwelcome* to the scribes. But particular notice is taken of its being very surprising to the people, who perhaps were ready to say, *As for this Jesus, we wot not what is become of him*; but when they beheld him coming to them again, they were *greatly amazed* (some copies add, *kai exephobethesan* — *and they were afraid*); and *running to him* (some copies for *prostrechontes*, read *proschairontes* — *congratulating him*, or bidding him welcome), they saluted him. It is easy to give a reason why they should be glad to see him; but why were they *amazed, greatly amazed*, when they beheld him? Probably, there might remain something unusual in his countenance; as Moses's *face shone* when he came down

from the mount, which made the people *afraid to come nigh him*, ⁽²³⁴⁰⁾Exodus 34:30. So perhaps did Christ's face, in some measure; at least, instead of seeming *fatigued*, there appeared a wonderful briskness and sprightliness in his looks, which *amazed* them.

II. The case which perplexed the disciples, brought before him. He asked the scribes, who, he knew, were always *vexatious* to his disciples, and *teazing* them upon every occasion, "*What question ye with them? What is the quarrel now?*" The scribes made no answer, for they were confounded at his presence; the disciples made none, for they were comforted, and now left all to him. But the father of the child opened the case, v. 17, 18.

1. His child is possessed with a *dumb spirit*; he has the falling-sickness, and in his fits *is speechless*; his case is very sad, for, wheresoever the fit takes him, the spirit *tears* him, throws him into such violent convulsions as almost pull him to pieces; and, which is very grievous to himself, and frightful to those about him, *he foams* at his mouth, and *gnashes with his teeth*, as one in pain and great misery; and though the fits go off presently, yet they leave him so weak, that he *pires away*, is worn to a skeleton; his flesh is *dried* away; so the word signifies, ^(2347B)Psalms 102:3-5. This was a constant affliction to a tender father.

2. The disciples cannot give him any relief; "*I desired they would cast him out*, as they had done many, and they would willingly have done it, but *they could not*; and therefore thou couldst never have come in better time; *Master, I have brought him to thee.*"

III. The rebuke he gave to them all (v. 19); *O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?* Dr. Hammond understands this as spoken to the disciples, reproving them for not exerting the power he had given them, and because they did not *fast* and *pray*, as in some cases he had directed them to do. But Dr. Whitby takes it as a rebuke to the scribes, who gloried in this disappointment that the disciples met with, and hoped to run them down with it. Then he calls a *faithless generation*, and speaks as one weary of *being with them*, and of *bearing with them*. We never heard him complaining, "How long shall I be in this low condition, and suffer that?" But, "How long shall I be among these *faithless* people, and suffer them?"

IV. The deplorable condition that the child was actually in, when he was brought to Christ, and the doleful representation which the father made of

it. When the child saw Christ, he fell into a fit; *The spirit straightway tore him, boiled within him, troubled him* (so Dr. Hammond); as if the devil would set Christ at defiance, and hoped to be too hard for him too, and to keep possession in spite of him. The child *fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming*. We may put another construction upon it — that the devil raged, and had so much the greater wrath, because he *knew that his time was short*, ⁽⁴¹⁷⁾Revelation 7:12. Christ asked, *How long since this came to him?* And, it seems, the disease was of long standing; it came to him *of a child* (v. 21), which made the case the more sad, and the cure more difficult. We are all by nature *children of disobedience*, and in such the evil spirit *works*, and has done so from our childhood; for *foolishness is bound in the heart of a child*, and nothing but the mighty grace of Christ can cast it out.

V. The pressing instances which the father of the child makes with Christ for a cure (v. 22); *Of times it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him*. Note, The devil aims at the ruin of those in whom he rules and works, and *seeks whom he may devour*. But, *if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us*. The leper was confident of Christ's power, but put an *if* upon his will (⁽⁴¹⁸⁾Matthew 8:2); *If thou wilt, thou canst*. This poor man referred himself to his good-will, but put an *if* upon his power, because his disciples, who cast out devils *in his name*, had been non-plussed in this case. Thus Christ suffers in his honour by the difficulties and follies of his disciples.

VI. The answer Christ gave to his address (v. 23); *If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*. Here,

1. He tacitly checks the weakness of his faith. The sufferer put it upon Christ's power, *If thou canst do any thing*, and reflected on the want of power in the disciples; but Christ turns it upon him, and puts him upon questioning his own faith, and will have him impute the disappointment to the want of that; *If thou canst believe*.

2. He graciously encourages the strength of his desire; *“All things are possible, will appear possible, to him that believes the almighty power of God, to which all things are possible;”* or *“That shall be done by the grace of God, for them that believe in the promise of God, which seemed utterly impossible.”* Note, In dealing with Christ, very much is put upon our believing, and very much promised it. *Canst thou believe? Darest thou*

believe? Art thou willing to venture thy all in the hands of Christ? To venture all thy spiritual concerns with him, and all thy temporal concerns for him? Canst thou find in thy heart to do this? If so, it is not impossible but that, though thou has been a great sinner, thou mayest be reconciled; though thou art very mean and unworthy, thou mayest get to heaven. *If thou canst believe*, it is possible that thy hard heart may be softened, thy spiritual diseases may be cured; and that, weak as thou art, thou mayest be able to hold out to the end.

VII. The *profession of faith* which the poor man made hereupon (v. 24); He cried out, “*Lord, I believe*; I am fully persuaded both of thy power and of thy pity; my cure shall not be prevented by the want of faith; *Lord, I believe*.” He adds a prayer for grace to enable him more firmly to rely upon the assurances he had of the ability and willingness of Christ to save; *Help thou my unbelief*. Note,

1. Even those who through grace can say, *Lord, I believe*, have reason to complain of their unbelief; that they cannot so readily apply to themselves, and their own case, the word of Christ as they should, no so cheerfully depend upon it.

2. Those that complain of unbelief, must look up to Christ for grace to *help* them against it, *and his grace shall be sufficient for them*. “*Help mine unbelief*, help me to a pardon for it, help me with power against it; help out what is wanting in my faith with thy grace, the strength of which is perfected in our weakness.”

VIII. The cure of the child, and the conquest of this raging devil in the child. Christ *saw the people come running together*, expecting to see the issue of this trial of skill, and therefore kept them in suspense no longer, but *rebuked the foul spirit*; the *unclean spirit*, so it should be rendered, as in other places. Observe,

1. What the charge was which Christ gave to this unclean spirit; “*Thou dumb and deaf spirit*, that makest the poor child dumb and deaf, but shalt thyself be made to *hear* thy doom, and not be able to *say* any thing against it, *come out of him* immediately, and *enter no more into him*. Let him not only be brought out of this fit, but let his fits never return.” Note, Whom Christ cures, he cures effectually. Satan may *go out himself*, and yet recover possession; but if Christ *cast* him out, he will *keep* him out.

2. How the unclean spirit took it; he grew yet more outrageous, he *cried*, and *rent him sore*, gave him such a twitch at parting, that he was *as one dead*; so loth was he to quit his hold, so exasperated at the superior power of Christ, so malicious to the child, and so desirous was he to kill him. *Many said, He is dead*. Thus the toss that a soul is in at the breaking of Satan's power in it may perhaps be frightful for the present, but opens the door to lasting comfort.

3. How the child was perfectly restored (v. 27); *Jesus took him by the hand, kratesas* — *took fast hold of him*, and strongly bore him up, and he arose and recovered, and all was well.

IX. The reason he gave to the disciples why they could not cast out this devil. They *enquired* of him privately *why they could not*, that wherein they were defective might be made up another time, and they might not again be thus publicly shamed; and he told them (v. 29), *This kind can come forth by nothing but prayer and fasting*. Whatever other difference there really might be, none appears between this and other kinds, but that the unclean spirit had had possession of this poor patient *from a child*, and that strengthened his interest, and confirmed his hold. When *vicious habits* are rooted by long usage, and begin to plead prescription, like chronical diseases that are *hardly cured*. *Can the Aethiopian change his skin?* The disciples must not think to do their work always with a like ease; some services call them to take more than ordinary pains; but Christ can do that with a word's speaking, which they must prevail for the doing of by *prayer and fasting*.

◀◀ MARK 9:30-40

THE APOSTLES REPROVED

Here,

I. Christ foretels his own approaching sufferings. He *passed through Galilee* with more expedition than usual, and *would not that any man should know of it* (v. 30); because he had done many mighty and good works among them in vain, they shall not be invited to see them and have the benefit of them, as they have been. The time of his sufferings drew nigh, and therefore he was willing to be private awhile, and to converse

only with his disciples, to prepare them for the approaching trial, v. 31. He said to them, *The Son of man is delivered* by the determinate council and fore-knowledge of God *into the hands of men* (v. 31), and *they shall kill him*. He had been delivered into the hands of devils, and they had worried him, it had not been so strange; but that *men*, who have *reason*, and should have *love*, that they should be thus spiteful to the *Son of man*, who came to redeem and save them, is unaccountable. But still it is observable that when Christ spoke of his death, he alway spoke of his resurrection, which took away the reproach of it from himself, and should have taken away the grief of it from his disciples. But they *understood not that saying*, v. 32. The words were plain enough, but they could not be reconciled to the thing, and therefore would suppose them to have some mystical meaning which they did not understand, and they were *afraid to ask him*; not because he was difficult of access, or stern to those who consulted him, but either because they were loth to know the truth, or because they expected to be chidden for their backwardness to receive it. Many remain ignorant because they are ashamed to enquire.

II. He rebukes his disciples for magnifying themselves. When he came to Capernaum, he privately asked his disciples what it was they *disputed among themselves by the way*, v. 33. He knew very well what the dispute was, but he would know it *from them*, and would have them to confess their fault and folly in it. Note,

- 1.** We must all expect to be called to an account by our Lord Jesus, concerning what passes while we are in the way in this state of passage and probation.
- 2.** We must in a particular manner be called to an account about our discourses among ourselves; for by our words we must be justified or condemned.
- 3.** As our other discourses among ourselves by the way, so especially our disputes, will be all called over again, and we shall be called to an account about them.
- 4.** Of all disputes, Christ will be sure to reckon with his disciples for their disputes about precedency and superiority: that was the subject of the debate here, *who should be the greater*, v. 34. Nothing could be more contrary to the two great laws of Christ's kingdom, lessons of his school, and instructions of his example, which are *humility* and *love*, than *desiring*

preferment in the world, and *disputing* about it. This ill temper he took all occasions to check, both because it arose from a mistaken notion of his kingdom, as if it were of this world, and because it tended so directly to be debasing of the honour, and the corrupting of the purity, of his gospel, and, he foresaw, would be so much the bane of the church.

Now,

(1.) They were willing to *cover this fault* (v. 34); they *held their peace*. As they would not *ask* (v. 32), because they were ashamed to own their ignorance, so here they would not *answer* because they were ashamed to own their pride.

(2.) He was willing to *amend this fault* in them, and to bring them to a better temper; and therefore *sat down*, that he might have a solemn and full discourse with them about this matter; he *called the twelve to him*, and told them,

[1.] That ambition and affectation of dignity and dominion, instead of gaining them preferment in his kingdom, would but postpone their preferment; *If any man desire and aim to be first, he shall be last*; he that exalteth himself, shall be abased, and men's *pride* shall *bring them low*.

[2.] That there is no preferment to be had under him, but an opportunity for, and an obligation to, so much the more labour and condescension; *If any man desire to be first*, when he is so, he must be much the more busy and serviceable to every body. *He that desires the office of a bishop, desires a good work*, for he must, as St. Paul did, labour the more abundantly, and make himself the *servant of all*.

[3.] That those who are most humble and self-denying, do most resemble Christ, and shall be most tenderly owned by him. This he taught them by a sign; *He took a child in his arms*, that had nothing of pride and ambition in it. "Look you," saith he; "*whosoever shall receive one like this child, receives me*. Those of a humble, meek, mild disposition are such as I will own and countenance, and encourage every body else to do so too, and will take what is done to them as done to myself; and so will my Father too, for he who thus *receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me*, and it shall be placed to his account, and repaid with interest."

III. He rebukes them for *vilifying all but themselves*; while they are striving which of them should be greatest, they will not allow those who are not in communion with them to be any thing. Observe,

1. The account which John gave him, of the restraint they had laid upon one from making use of the name of Christ, because he was not of their society. Though they were ashamed to own their contests for preferment, they seem to boast of this exercise of their authority, and expected their Master would not only justify them in it, but commend them for it; and hoped he would not blame them for desiring to be great, when they would thus use their power for maintaining the honour of the sacred college. *Master, saith John, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, but he followeth not us, v. 38.*

(1.) It was strange that the one who was not a professed disciple and follower of Christ, should yet have power to *cast out devils*, in his name, for that seemed to be peculiar to those whom he called, ~~Mark~~ Mark 6:7. But some think that he was a disciple of John, who made use of the name of the Messiah, not as come, but as near at hand, not knowing that Jesus was he. It should rather seem that he made use of the name of Jesus, believing him to be the Christ, as the other disciples did. And why not he receive that power from Christ, whose *Spirit*, like the wind, *blows where it listeth*, without such an outward call as the apostles had? And perhaps there were many more such. Christ's grace is not tied to the visible church.

(2.) It was strange that one who *cast out devils* in the name of Christ, did not join himself to the apostles, and follow Christ with them, but should continue to act in *separation* from them. I know of nothing that could hinder him from following them, unless because he was loth to leave all to follow them; and if so, that was an ill principle. The thing did not look well, and therefore the disciples *forbade him* to make use of Christ's name as they did, unless he would follow him as they did. This was like the motion Joshua made concerning Eldad and Medad, that prophesied in the camp, and went not up with the rest to the door of the tabernacle; "*My lord Moses, forbid them* (~~Chaps~~ Numbers 11:28); restrain them, silence them, for it is a schism." Thus apt are we to imagine that those do not follow Christ at all, who do not follow him *with us*, and that those do nothing well, who do not just as we do. But the *Lord knows them that are his*, however they are dispersed; and this instance gives us a needful caution, to take heed lest we be carried, by an excess of zeal for the unity of the

church, and for that which we are sure is right and good, to oppose that which yet may tend to the enlargement of the church, and the advancement of its true interests another way.

2. The rebuke he gave to them for this (v. 39); *Jesus said, "Forbid him not, nor any other that does likewise."* This was like the check Moses gave to Joshua; *Enviest thou for my sake?* Note, That which is good, and doeth good, must not be prohibited, though there be some defect or irregularity in the manner of doing it. *Casting out devils*, and so destroying Satan's kingdom, doing this *in Christ's name*, and so owning him to be sent of God, and giving honour to him as the Fountain of grace, preaching down sin, and preaching up Christ, are good things, very good things, which ought not to be forbidden to any, merely because they *follow not with us*. If Christ be preached, Paul therein doth, and will rejoice, though he be eclipsed by it, ^{<3118>}Philippians 1:18. Two reasons Christ gives why such should not be forbidden.

(1.) Because we cannot suppose that any man who makes use of Christ's name in working miracles, should blaspheme his name, as the scribes and Pharisees did. There were those indeed that did *in Christ's name cast out devils*, and yet in other respects were *workers of iniquity*; but they did not *speak evil of Christ*.

(2.) Because those that differed in communion, while they agreed to fight against Satan under the banner of Christ, ought to look upon one another as on the same side, notwithstanding that difference. *He that is not against us is on our part*. As to the great controversy between Christ and Beelzebub, he had said, *He that is not with me is against me*, ^{<420>}Matthew 12:30. He that will not own Christ, owns Satan. But as to those that own Christ, though not in the same circumstances, that follow him, though *not with us*, we must reckon that though these differ from us, they are not against us, and therefore are *on our part*, and we must not be any hindrance to their usefulness.

<494> MARK 9:41-50

PAIN TO BE PREFERRED TO SIN

Here,

I. Christ promiseth a reward to all those that are any way kind to his disciples (v. 41); “*Whosoever shall give you a cup of water, when you need it, and will be a refreshment to you, because ye belong to Christ, and are of his family, he shall not lose his reward.*” Note,

1. It is the honour and happiness of Christians, that they *belong to Christ*, they have joined themselves to him, and are owned by him; they wear his livery and retainers to his family; nay, they are more nearly related, they are *members of his body*.

2. They who belong to Christ, may sometimes be reduced to such straits as to be glad of a *cup of cold water*.

3. The relieving of Christ's poor in their distresses, is a good deed, and will turn a good account; he accepts it, and will reward it.

4. What kindness is done to Christ's poor, must be done them *for his sake*, and *because they belong to him*; for that is it that sanctifies the kindness, and puts a value upon it in the sight of God.

5. This is a reason why we must not discountenance and discourage those who are serving the interests of Christ's kingdom, though they are not in every thing of our mind and way. It comes in here as a reason why those must not be hindered, that cast out devils in Christ's name, though they did not follow him; for (as Dr. Hammond paraphrases it) “It is not only the great eminent performances which are done by you my constant attendants and disciples, that are accepted by me, but every the least degree of sincere faith and Christian performance, proportionable but to the expressing the least kindness, as giving a cup of water to a disciple of mine for being such, shall be accepted and rewarded.” If Christ reckons *kindness to us* services to *him*, we ought to reckon *services to him* kindnesses to us, and to encourage them, though done by those that follow not with us.

II. He threatens those that *offend his little ones*, that wilfully are the occasion of sin or trouble to them, v. 42. Whosoever shall grieve any true Christians, though they be of the weakest, shall oppose their *entrance* into the ways of God, or discourage and obstruct their *progress* in those ways, shall either restrain them from doing good, or draw them in to commit sin, it were *better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea*: his punishment will be very great, and the death

and ruin of his soul more terrible than such a death and ruin of his body would be. See ^{<486>}Matthew 18:6.

III. He warns all his followers to take heed of ruining their own souls. This charity must begin at home; if we must take heed of doing any thing to hinder others from good, and to occasion their sin, much more careful must we be to avoid every thing that will take us off from our duty, or lead us to sin; and that which doth so we must part with, though it be ever so dear to us. This we had twice in Matthew, ^{<485>}Matthew 5:29, 30, and ^{<488>}Matthew 18:8, 9. It is here urged somewhat more largely and pressingly; certainly this requires our serious regard, which is so much insisted upon. Observe,

- 1.** The case supposed, that our own *hand*, or *eye*, or *foot*, *offend us*; that the impure *corruption* we indulge is as dear to us as an eye or a hand, or that that which is to us as an eye or a hand, is become an invisible *temptation* to sin, or *occasion* of it. Suppose the beloved is become a sin, or the sin a beloved. Suppose we cannot keep that which is dear to us, but it will be a snare and a stumbling-block; suppose we must part with it, or part with Christ and a good conscience.
- 2.** The duty prescribed in that case; *Pluck out the eye, cut off the hand and foot*, mortify the darling lust, kill it, crucify it, starve it, make no provision for it. Let the idols that have been *delectable* things, be cast away as *detestable* things; keep at a distance from that which is a temptation, though ever so pleasing. It is necessary that the part which is gangrened, should be taken off for the preservation of the whole. *Immedicabile vulnus ense recidendum est, ne pars sincera trahatur* — *The part that is incurably wounded must be cut off, lest the parts that are sound be corrupted*. We must put ourselves to pain, that we may not bring ourselves to ruin; self must be denied, that it may not be destroyed.
- 3.** The necessity of doing this. The flesh must be mortified, that we may *enter into life* (v. 43, 45), into the kingdom of God, v. 47. Though, by abandoning sin, we may, for the present, feel ourselves as if we were *halt* and *maimed* (it may seem to be a force put upon ourselves, and may create us some uneasiness), yet it is for *life*; and all that men have, they will give for their lives: it is for a *kingdom*, the *kingdom of God*, which we cannot otherwise obtain; these *halts* and *maims* will be the *marks of the Lord Jesus*, will be in that kingdom *scars of honour*.

4. The danger of not doing this. The matter is brought to this issue, that either sin must die, or we must die. If we will lay this *Delilah* in our bosom, it will betray us; if we be *ruled* by sin, we shall inevitably be *ruined* by it; if we must keep our *two hands*, and *two eyes*, and *two feet*, we must with them be *cast into hell*. Our Saviour often pressed our duty upon us, from the consideration of the torments of hell, which we run ourselves into if we continue in sin. With what an emphasis of terror are those words repeated three times here, *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched!* The words are quoted from ~~262~~ Isaiah 66:24.

(1.) The reflections and reproaches of the sinner's own conscience are the *worm that dieth not*; which will cleave to the damned soul as the worms do to the dead body, and prey upon it, and never leave it till it is quite devoured. *Son, remember*, will set this worm gnawing; and how terrible will it bite that word (~~262~~ Proverbs 5:12, 23), *How have I hated instruction!* The soul that is food to this worm, dies not; and the worm is bred in it, and one with it, and therefore neither doth that die. Damned sinners will be to eternity accusing, condemning, and upbraiding, themselves with their own follies, which, how much soever they are now in love with them, will at the last *bite like a serpent*, and *sting like an adder*.

(2.) The wrath of God fastening upon a guilty and polluted conscience, is the *fire that is not quenched*; for it is the wrath of the living God, the eternal God, into whose hands it is a fearful thing to fall. There are no operations of the Spirit of grace upon the souls of the damned sinners, and therefore there is nothing to alter the nature of the fuel, which must remain for ever combustible; nor is there any application of the merit of Christ to them, and therefore there is nothing to appease or quench the violence of the fire. Dr. Whitby shows that the eternity of the torments of hell was not only the constant faith of the Christian church, but had been so of the Jewish church. Josephus saith, The Pharisees held that the souls of the wicked were to be *punished with perpetual punishment*; and that there was appointed for them *a perpetual prison*. And Philo saith, The punishment of the wicked is *to live for ever dying*, and to be *for ever in pains and griefs that never cease*.

The two last verses are somewhat difficult, and interpreters agree not in the sense of them; *for every one* in general, or rather every one *of them* that are cast into hell, shall be *salted with fire*, and *every sacrifice shall be salted with salt*. Therefore *have salt in yourselves*.

[1.] It was appointed by the law of Moses, that every sacrifice should be *salted with salt*, not to *preserve* it (for it was to be immediately consumed), but because it was the food of God's table, and no flesh is eaten without salt; it was therefore particularly required in the meat-offerings, ^{<4023>}Leviticus 2:13.

[2.] The nature of man, being *corrupt*, and as such being called *flesh* (^{<1063>}Genesis 6:3; ^{<4933>}Psalm 78:39), some way or other must be *salted*, in order to its being a sacrifice to God. The *salting* of fish (and I think of other things) they call the *curing* of it.

[3.] Our chief concern is, to present ourselves *living sacrifices* to the grace of God (^{<5111>}Romans 12:1), and, in order to our acceptableness, we must be *salted with salt*, our corrupt affections must be subdued and mortified, and we must have in our souls a savour of grace. Thus the *offering up* or *sacrificing* of the Gentiles is said to be *acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost*, as the sacrifices were *salted*, ^{<5156>}Romans 15:16.

[4.] Those that have the salt of grace, must make it appear that they have it; that they *have salt in themselves*, a living principle of grace in their hearts, which works out all corrupt dispositions, and every thing in the soul that tends to *putrefaction*, and would *offend* our God, or our own consciences, as unsavoury meat doth. Our *speech* must be *always with grace seasoned with this salt*, that no *corrupt communication* may *proceed out of our mouth*, but we may loathe it as much as we would to put putrid meat into our mouths.

[5.] As this gracious salt will keep our own consciences void of offence, so it will keep our conversation with others so, that we may not offend any of Christ's little ones, but may be *at peace one with another*.

[6.] We must not only have this salt of grace, but we must always retain the relish and savour of it; for if this *salt lose its saltiness*, if a Christian revolt from his Christianity, if he loses the savour of it, and be no longer under the power and influence of it, what can recover him, or *wherewith will ye season him?* This was said ^{<4053>}Matthew 5:13.

[7.] Those that present not themselves *living sacrifices* to God's grace, shall be made for ever *dying sacrifices* to his justice, and since they would not give honour to him, he will get him honour upon them; they would not be *salted with the salt* of divine grace, would not admit that to subdue

their corrupt affections, no, they would not submit to the operation, could not bear the corrosives that were necessary to eat out the proud flesh, it was to them like cutting off a hand, or plucking out an eye; and therefore in hell they shall be *salted with fire*; coals of fire shall be *scattered* upon them (^{<3012>}Ezekiel 10:2), as salt upon the meat, and *brimstone* (^{<3885>}Job 18:15), as fire and brimstone were rained on Sodom; the pleasures they have lived in, *shall eat their flesh, as it were with fire*, ^{<5012>}James 5:3. The pain of mortifying the flesh now is no more to be compared with the punishment for not mortifying it, than *salting* with *burning*. And since he had said, that the *fire* of hell *shall not be quenched*, but it might be objected, that the fuel will not last always, he here intimates, that by the power of God it shall be made to last always; for those that are *cast into hell*, will find the fire to have not only the *corroding* quality of salt, but its *preserving* quality; whence it is used to signify that which is *lasting*: a covenant of *salt* is a *perpetual* covenant, and Lot's wife being turned into a *pillar of salt*, made her a remaining monument of divine vengeance. Now since this will certainly be the doom of those that do not crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, let us, knowing this *terror of the Lord*, be *persuaded* to do it.