

Salty Language

⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. – Colossians 4:6

It's not just what you say. It's how you say it. The context of this verse seems to indicate that Paul has in mind our conversation with those outside of the church, for in verse 4, he requests the prayers of his readers for his effectiveness as a preacher, and in verse 5, he challenges them to guard their conduct in the presence of outsiders and to make the most of their opportunities. If we are to be effective communicators of God's truth to others, we need to give attention to how we express ourselves. And, we are not to be content with a single "one-size-fits-all" canned presentation. We must be attentive to people as individuals, "so that we will know how to answer everyone."

"Seasoned with salt" seems to be another way of saying "full of grace." Paul probably did not have in mind here God's grace as a Christian doctrine. To the Greek, to speak with grace conveyed the idea of speaking in such a way that was attractive, charming, engaging and pleasant. But, to expand the idea of attractive speech, he uses a phrase that comes right out of the world of Old Testament sacrifice; "seasoned with salt."

¹³Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings. – Leviticus 2:13

Salt accompanied the Old Testament sacrifices for a variety of reasons. A covenant of salt between two men was regarded by the ancients as an unbreakable alliance of friendship. In fact, YAHWEH described his relationship with Israel as a "covenant of salt" in Numbers 18:19. In 2 Chronicles 13:5, He described his promise of Israel's kingship to the line of David in the same way. The worshipper did not bring salt to the temple when he brought his sacrifice. The salt was warehoused at the temple. Most appropriately, the part of the process of sacrifice that expressed enduring faithfulness was the part that God kept on hand.

Salt was an agent of purification, a cleansing agent. Any sacrifice to YAHWEH called for the best of the best that a man had to bring. Still, the best of the best could never be holy in the same sense that God is holy, so a further purification aspect to the ritual of sacrifice was very meaningful.

Salt was a preserver. The use of salt with the sacrifices hinted that a divine provision was being made to preserve the closeness of the worshipper with YAHWEH.

Salt added savor to the sacrifice. In and of themselves, the sacrifices of the people were unsavory. On a highly practical note, significant amounts of the actual meat offered became the sustenance of the priest and his family, so savoring the meat was beneficial.

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt ..." Paul's primary meaning behind this instruction may have been nothing more than to remind us that our conversations that represent Jesus should never be boring, harsh, canned or insipid. But, it may also be a reminder for the would-be witness to rely on the power of God to fill in the many voids where our best efforts come up short. We are talking here of touching the hearts of sinners with the message of the cross. On our best, most winsome and clever day, we need significant divine assistance. Confess your dependency on God in this matter.

Whenever we speak to others about Jesus, it is a sacred act of service to God. The task calls for the best effort of which we are capable. Obviously we should avoid the extreme of thinking that our best effort will ever convict a human soul of sin and righteousness. But, we should also avoid the extreme of being silent because we distrust our abilities as witnesses. We should find great encouragement in knowing that in addition to our best effort (and we do owe the process our best effort), God is providing His faithfulness, His purity, His incorruptibility and His savor.

© 2005 by R. Karl Crouch, 551 Abbeyville Road, Lancaster, PA 17603