

Negative Effects of Christian Compromise

In this series of articles we're seeking to unpack Jesus' teaching about the Christian calling to be "salt and light" from Matthew 5:13-16. In my last article we looked at the importance of Christian influence. We've already made three primary observations from the text. First, although good government can be a wonderful benefit to its citizens, politics and the political structure is not the instrument intended by God to bring about genuine and lasting change in this world. Looking initially at the topic of salt, we saw secondly that, only Christians are said by Jesus to be salt. Third, we saw that the primary purposes of salt are twofold: to be a preservative against decay and spoil as well as being a flavor enhancer.

Along with the purpose of salt, Jesus next teaches us the promise of salt. Where Christians are seeking to be faithful in our responsibility to be "salt" in our society we have the promise that our efforts are never, ultimately, in vain and that God will be glorified (Matt; 5:16; 1 Peter 4:11). For example, Christians have historically made a positive preserving influence even on a national scale. Speaking of a national Christian influence in the eighteenth century one historian writes, "The only thing that saved England from a revolution as horrible and bloody as the French Revolution was the evangelical revival under the preaching and teaching of men like John Wesley and George Whitfield." So many people were coming to faith under the preaching of these men that the revival had a positive influence on the entire nation.

Although Christian influence has happened on a national scale, for most Christians our positive influence will happen in much quieter ways and on a much smaller scale. For example, when we refuse to join in when others are speaking negatively about their neighbors, political figures, etc., it matters; when we treat others with respect when they usually get disrespect, it matters; when we pray for those who need to know the love of Jesus Christ, it matters; when we intentionally seek to befriend our non-Christian neighbors who, like all mankind, are made in the image of God, it matters; when we refuse to compromise our biblical beliefs, it matters. In these and many other ways, by God's grace, we become a preserving influence. Keep in mind that the promise from Christ is not, necessarily, that your non-believing neighbor will be saved. But seeking to be salt is never a waste of our time and God is always glorified in our properly motivated obedience no matter the eventual outcome of our interactions with others.

Let's look now at the second part of verse 13: "...but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet." The chemical properties of sodium chloride (salt) make it a relatively stable compound. How, then, could salt lose its taste? In first century Palestine, salt was primarily acquired from the shores of the Dead Sea. Much of the salt was a chunk of sodium chloride mixed with impurities. As water washed through it, much of the sodium chloride could be dissolved leaving a residue that looked like salt, but no longer had the flavor and preserving influence of salt.

Analogous to that is what it would look like for Christians to become mixed with all sorts of worldly impurities. If we compromise with the world we lose our ability to be a preserving influence and a flavor enhancer. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote, "The glory of the gospel is that when the Church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it. It is then that the world is drawn to her message, though it may hate it at first." There's such an irony here in the fact that many Christians and even Christian churches have compromised biblical truth and have often become like the world with the view to attracting the world for the gospel. Rather than worship services that are regulated by God's word, churches have often, it seems, become entertainment venues. The prevailing mindset seems to be, "If they like us, maybe they'll like our Jesus." Although the length of the service may remain fixed, the sermon (Rom. 1:16-17; 10:14-15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-21), has been shortened, or sometimes replaced, with e.g., more music and singing, personal reflection time, giving of awards, etc. Christians may open the door for a hearing of the gospel when we seek, by grace, to exhibit the beauty and character of Christ with our lives and when we worship God as we're taught from the Scriptures. Rev. Dr. Steve Jones is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church PCA in Paxton, Illinois