

The Problem of Compromise in the Japanese Church

By Mike Costanzo

“You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.” Christians are called to be radically different from the rest of the world, and to have a radical effect on the world. But if Christians lose their saltiness, or conceal their light under a basket, how can they have an effect on the world?

Compromise has always been a big problem in the church, and the Japanese church is no exception. One of the reasons that the Japanese church is small is that there are many congregations that do not take a stand on important issues. When believers let the world set the standards rather than God, the result is the same: the gospel is watered down, and always with disastrous consequences. In the same way, a tendency of compromise is one of the biggest problems facing the Japanese church today.

Japanese Christians often feel isolated and ostracized, both by their acquaintances as well as by society at large. Many feel that to stand out and be different from those around them would be perceived as being antisocial, insensitive, and uncooperative. Thus, in order to maintain their relationships with their friends, family, and co-workers, they feel they must keep their Christianity safely “under wraps”.

But when we compromise our core values and allow the lesser things to rule the greater, we cause incalculable harm, both to ourselves and to everyone around us. When we suppress who we are as Christians, we deprive the world of a priceless treasure and do damage to our own souls. When husbands and wives put work or duty ahead of their relationship, they rob their families of joy and love. And when we bow the knee to idols to escape the fiery furnace of others’ disapproval, we rob the gospel of its power and give the impression that Christ is content to share his throne with the gods of the earth.

It is a myth that Japanese people always prefer meekness and soft-spoken agreeability over directness and boldness and courage. On the contrary, environmental activists, outspoken political leaders, and anti-war heralds are admired for their courage to take a stand for what they believe is right. It is true that the nail that sticks up faces hardships and persecution, but those that endure the hammering and remain standing earn the undying respect, loyalty, and admiration of those around them.

There is a difference between having the strength to resist compromise and simply being insensitive to those around us. As Christians, we should be caring and sensitive towards everyone; living uncompromisingly for Jesus does not mean being rude or unloving. But when

Christians lack the courage to take a stand for what is right, they lose their chance to change their world for the better. If we lose our distinctiveness from the world, we lose our voice in it.

Just as the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church and causes it to grow, compromise is a drought that withers it from the root. The gospel is a spring of living water, but compromise is a cistern—a broken cistern that can hold no water. May we all grow in grace and strength of character to resist the temptation to compromise.